

ISSUE 99



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NZ HUNTER

M A G A Z I N E

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2024



SOUTH MARLBOROUGH

A two-for-one on Red stags for Jake Care, and editor Luke takes home an old beast as well

CHAMOIS ON EACH COAST

A 10.75" West Coast buck by Tom McKay, and an ancient old East Coast doe for Rachelle Grant

GOOD THINGS TAKE TIME

A great story of restraint with young bulls and hard work in steep Fiordland from Jarrod McLauchlan

SeaSucker

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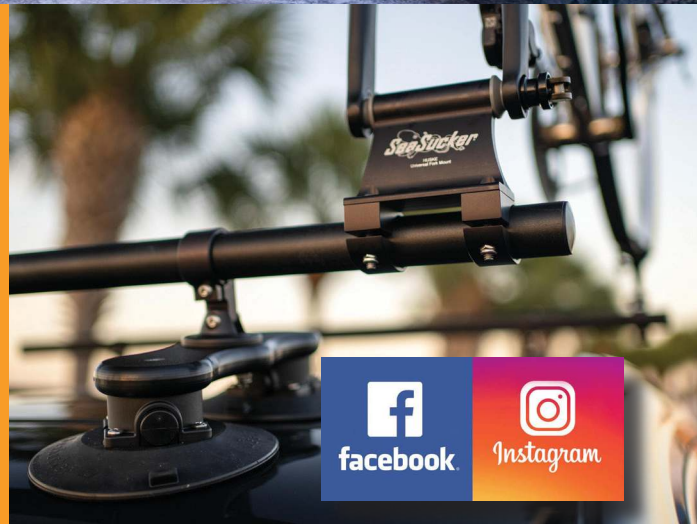


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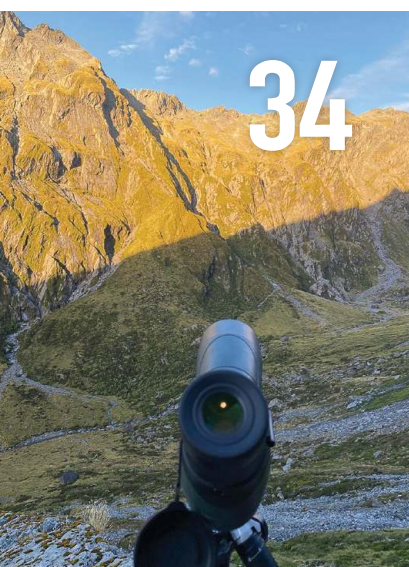
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COVER PHOTO: Jake Care thrilled with his best stag to date, taken in the South Marlborough backcountry.

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR



I hope the New Year had been treating you all as well as it has us. We finally managed to get away for a real adventure with 15 days in the Hooker/Landsborough Wilderness Area.

What a great break that was! We ran a little short of food and eventually got chased out by that big rain that washed out South Westland again, but the only negative to the trip was seeing so many nanny tahr in places we haven't seen them before. We definitely have more work to do in Management Unit 6

A lot of people have been asking when the new Hunting and Fishing Minister is going to start doing something, and I have to say be patient. We've had preliminary discussions and the poor beggars have only just got their feet under the table. They all have multiple portfolios and are getting pulled every which way at the moment. We will be working steadily

through a list of what can be done by when, and we'll keep you all informed as things progress.

We need to make sure we all support and promote Fish and Game's ReWild campaign. This initiative is all about showing New Zealanders who don't hunt and fish, what it is we do and why we are so passionate about it. Fish and Game is not just promoting freshwater fishing and game bird hunting, they are including all forms of hunting and fishing. The campaign highlights all the wonderful mental and physical health benefits from hunting and fishing, and show cases all the great conservation work hunters and fishers do for the wider community.

For more information see page 50, and join in and support the campaign when the opportunity arises.

With the bugle and roar just around the corner, we ask everyone please to do their bit to promote proper game animal

management and to lead by example. If you're only after a bit of meat, and have the option of a range of animals, please take a hind or yearling if possible. If you're after a trophy - beg, borrow or steal a spotter to evaluate animals properly, and only pull the trigger if it's a truly mature animal. If in doubt, let go, let it grow. If we all practice proper management, there will be more than enough trophies to go round for everyone. If not, it just becomes the race to the bottom we see in so many places already...

See the GAC's education tab on their website <https://nzgameanimalcouncil.org.nz/education/> for more information on their "Better Hunting" program to become a more successful hunter, Hunter Safety, Looking After Our Game Animals, and the NZ Red Stag Aging Guide which applies to most species. This will help us all look after the future of hunting in New Zealand.

Wishing you all a safe and successful roar.

Greg

SPOT THE LOGO

The winners for last issue are **Seth Mellis-Glynn** and **Geraldine Patterson**. Logos appeared on page 12, the NIOA advert, and page 53 the Hunters Element advert

Visit www.nzhunter.co.nz for this issue's "Spot the Logo" Competition

Two prizes of \$100 H&F vouchers to be won www.nzhunter.co.nz/spot-the-logo-competition

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Episode 1: Feb 4 'Hedging Bets for a Red'

Willie and Greg split teams to improve their chances of securing a Red stag before they drop their antlers. A giant is located and the stakeout begins...

Episode 2: Feb 11 'Tour of the South'

The team head South for an impressive 4WD and hunting tour through the Otago high country. With some venison and pork on the deck, can Luke break his jinx and catch that elusive big mountain boar on camera?

Episode 3: Feb 18 'Two Times a Test'

New team member Kieran is thrust into action on a classic Canterbury Red stag and Chamois hunt. When the first trip proves testing, can they pull it off on the second attempt?

Episode 4: Feb 25 'Sika Therapy'

When Greg and Fi's Hawke's Bay property is devastated by Cyclone Gabrielle, some time away from the arduous flood recovery hunting the local Kaweka Sika herd proves to be just what the doctor ordered.

Episode 5: March 3 'Hooked on the Alpine' Part 1

The crew embark on a big expedition into the South Westland alpine country with hopes of summiting Mt Hooker and bagging an ancient tahr and chamois along the way.

Episode 6: March 10 'Hooked on the Alpine' Part 2

Continuing with their multi-sport alpine expedition, some wilderness trout fishing and packrafting is destined to round-off the trip.

Episode 7: March 17 'Struggle Stick Chronicles'

Teaming backup with bow hunter Cody Weller, the boys attempt to go one better than last season and secure a mature Red stag with the bow on film. From the Otago roar to the Marlborough winter, the struggle is real...

Episode 8: March 24 'A Fowl Feast'

Joined by Fish & Game NZ's CEO Corina Jordan and top wild game chef Dariush Lolaiy, the team set about harvesting some late season mallards for an elaborate duck dinner.

Willie



Rich Gibbins

Pictured "Hubba Hubba" 2": 1.3kg (min.weight)

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TWO FOR ONE

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

This was a trip which nearly didn't happen. It was ready to go when Gabrielle upended the beginning of 2023

The second bit of motivation was hosting the crew from Sako international and Beretta New Zealand to film the launch of the Sako 90. (This was a huge undertaking with 17 crew plus all of us at Lake Heron Station!)

Anyway! Once we'd finally got magazine HQ somewhat out of immediate danger, and since we were heading south for the Sako event anyway, I decided to head down a few days early and drag Jake my younger brother with me.

I'd had plenty of good chats with our local bow hunter/goat culler about the

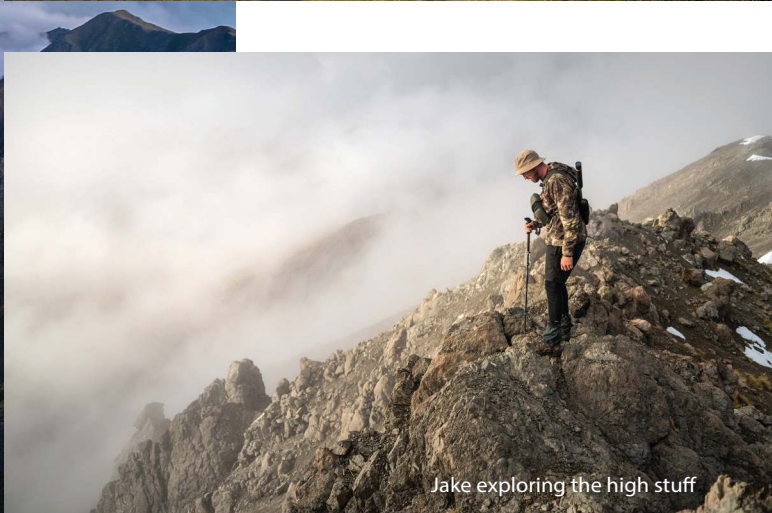
area. As we all know there can be some great heads in South Marlborough but a sustained history of WARO combined with some fairly arid country means they're few and far between. You have to cover a lot of miles just to find the deer, let alone a mature one, but Cody had given us a few pointers.

When the time came we had a great hoon in with South Pacific Helicopters and their hotrod Squirrel. We did a food drop at a hut on the way in and then carried on to a high ridge. **Despite the fun I couldn't wait to step out of the machine and get the binoculars going.** Of course we would have just sent every helicopter-shy stag ducking for cover, but that didn't stop me racing the

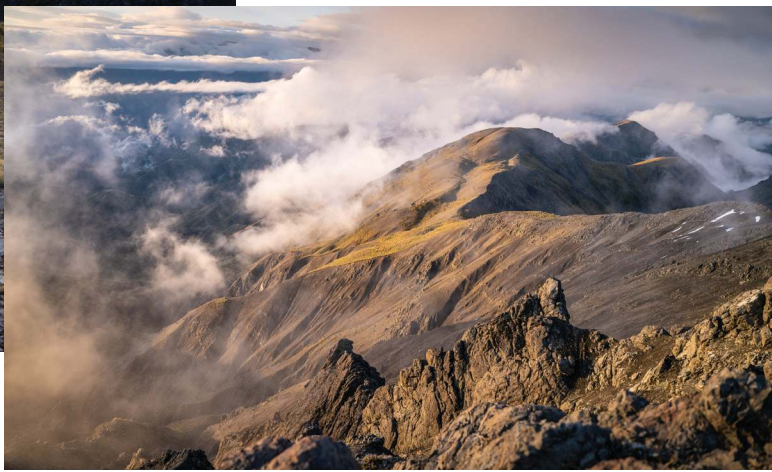
glass across every hillside in sight. There was still a bit of low cloud and drizzle so we set up camp and waited for it to clear. As evening approached it did, making for a stunning evening above the clouds. We saw a couple of hinds and returned to camp hoping for a clear morning, filled with excitement of the beginning of hunting new country.

Up early, I was mildly surprised not to have heard an early roar or two.

We headed down the main ridge and climbed a high point with a great view of the catchment. Glassing hard and only turned up one group of young stags in the lower country. It dampened our excitement a bit, but as the morning warmed up we saw a couple of stags way across the catchment, one of which had 'something' up top. They were too far to really tell, but one of them was a substantial stag.



Jake exploring the high stuff



A plan was made to move camp. Shuffling down to a side ridge that had us in position to have a crack at the 'something' over the river, but spending one more evening checking out the unknown country behind us. **Despite the lack of animals there was such good feed and some sign, it was too good to chase after mirages just yet.**

We snoozed away some of the day's heat, 2023 was a hot autumn! Then headed further down the main ridge we'd been working for the last couple of days. We spotted a couple of scattered deer, at a rate of about one per 1000 hectares. A great encounter was had with a curious falcon. He was quite happy to let me approach, as long as I stayed in full view and moved slowly.

Pushing further and further, through some steep and craggy ridges, we finally rounded the corner to a shaded valley.

It had a bit more cover than the others we'd past so seemed to warrant a probably sit down evaluation. After five minutes our hunch was rewarded with an orange dot detaching itself from the scrub, coming out to feed. We quickly saw that it was a large mature stag, in incredible condition. We dropped a little lower and confirmed our earlier opinion. **The range was 500 yards, and it looked as though we could back off the ridge and sneak up on a better rest at 300 so that's precisely what we attempted.**

We lost sight of the stag behind the ridge, and as we poked our noses over I could see him staring right toward us and felt a horrible tickle on the back of my neck as the thermals started to ease and the wind became variable near the shaded

side of the gully. I quickly clipped in the bipod and got Jake set up, barely looking at the stag. He got settled behind the rifle and I dialled the Leupold. By the time I was prone with my binoculars ready so was Jake, so I told him to go for it.

The 28 Nosler let rip and a huge cloud of dry Marlborough dust blew up from the claypan in front of us. The stag was hit, but more lung than shoulder so he ran down into a tussock gut and we lost sight of him. Jake reloaded and all of a sudden he was there again, climbing powerfully up the other side. **I couldn't believe it, he just took a 180gn Berger to the chest and he looked like a racehorse!**

Luckily he did the classic Red stag 'last look' and Jake squeezed off as he did so,



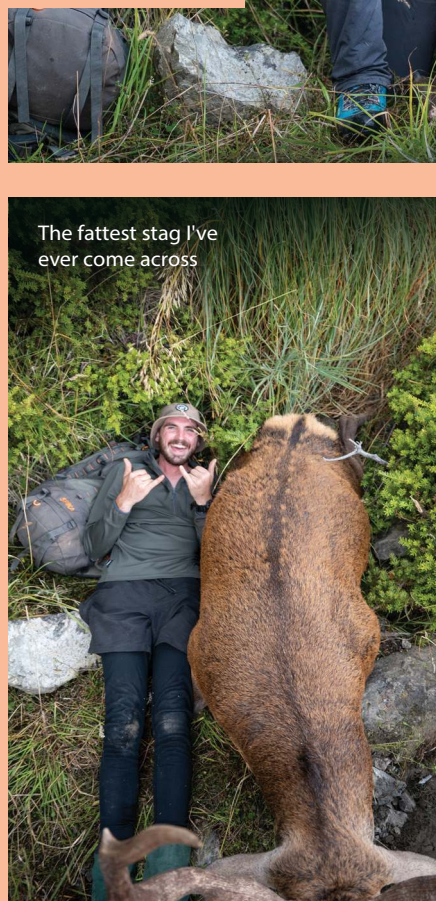
This falcon was very tolerant as long as I stayed in full view while I moved closer



Jake's best stag to date, an eight year old 13



Jake's stag moments before the shot



The fattest stag I've ever come across



The accidental bonus stag

only to miss! He was a little frantic as we watched the great stag puff and pant as he steadily increased the range. Fortunately Jake's last shot connected better, dropping him cleanly, and conveniently rolling back down the hill for us.

The celebrations were exuberant. We were both buzzing, that last look at him as he climbed out of the gutter was magnificent. A deep rich colour, huge body and mountains of fat, and of course a cracking twelve point head atop! It was the best stag Jake had seen on the hoof, and one of the better ones for me too.

The speargrass infested boulderfield was crossed in record time and we picked up the identifying slip to find the stag dead exactly where he should be. Jake picked the head up in wonder, a nicely proportioned 13 as it turned out. The stag carried a lot of weight in the tops, which I find quite appealing, and had a little snag on the right top bringing him to a 13. He was a nice mature stag of eight years, a brilliant one to take.

What really stuck out was his condition though.

I've never seen a stag so fat. He was truly round, like a barrel, and had fat all the way up to his cheeks making him look more like a child's drawing of a stag than a real one with his chubby cheeks and spindly legs sticking out the bottom! He was layered with kilos of clean white fat. Butchering him was a messy affair and we looked forward to the first taste.

All the while I worked on cutting the stag up, I wondered. Things just weren't stacking up. I said to Jake, "when we had the first shot, did it look as though he was missing bey tines? And a bit paler than when we saw him in the shadow for the second shot?" He agreed....

On the way back I just had to make a detour and check a suspicion I had. Sure enough, under heavy packs and with the sun already leaving the tops, we discovered another

stag dead in the stream below. The extraordinary series of events all clicked into place, it was worthy of fiction.

In the brief period of time we moved shooting positions the first stag must have moved out of sight into the gutter, followed by this stag walking along his track. By the time we laid eyes on him he was in the exact same spot. Not even considering the possibility of another stag and not having the time to set the spotter up we simply shot him, missing the different antler configuration as we hurried before he spooked. He was hit right where I thought, in the lungs.

Except he'd piled up in the creek out of sight, spooking the initial stag – which is why he looked so hale and hearty when we shot him too!

Unfortunately the mistake stag was a younger five-six year old 12 pointer missing beys, a prime stag that we would certainly have left if we hadn't been quite so confused. Jake was thrilled either way, his two best stags by a solid margin. We were less thrilled about the hike home, it was a monstrous walk back to the tents and it was already dark by the time we started butchering the second stag.

It was a huge night that severely challenged Jake's discomfort with exposure. Walking the nasty razorback ridges in the dark with a seriously laden pack and tired legs made for some quite nervous chatter from my younger brother! I'll admit, peering into the abyss of blackness either side with the headlamps wasn't exactly fun. We eventually staggered into the tent at 2AM, still taking the time to lay the precious early season venison out to cool.

We tried for a sleep in, but it was simply too lovely to sleep for long. We watched the sky flow through cold pre-dawn, to rich sunrise colours, all the while admiring the pair of antlers



The 2am finish after our uncomfortable rock-scramble made for a big day

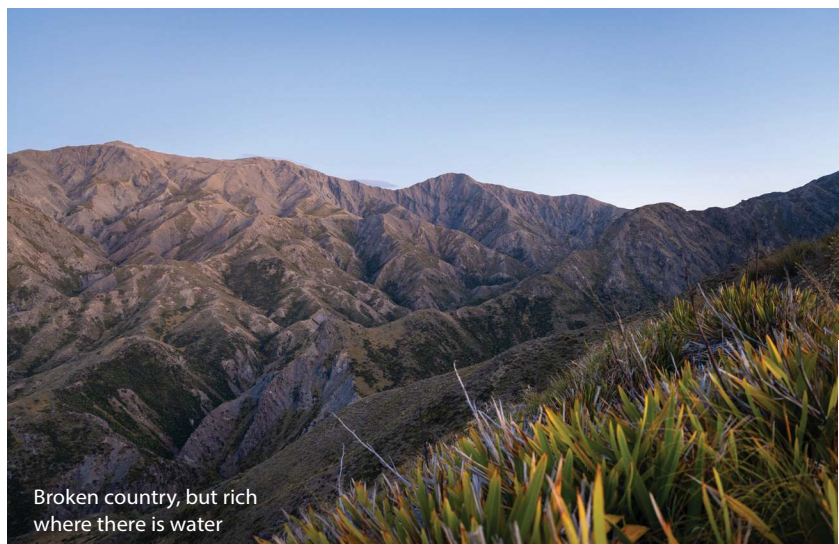


Vacuum-packing the prime venison back at the hut to keep the flies away





That morning we had come from about where Jake's head is



Broken country, but rich where there is water

This all combined to make it exceedingly difficult to muster the energy to climb the 500m vertical up on to the ridge behind the hut in search of the 'something' stag we had spotted from across the catchment.

However, as with many things, the thinking

was worse than the doing. The packs felt like cotton wool with all of the meat removed and any unneeded gear left at the hut, and it was quite surprising how quickly we knocked the climb out with a steady, even pace – all helped by the fading ferocity of the setting sun.

Atop the ridge it was a stunning evening. Windless and full of colour like only a hot summer evening can do (except it was autumn!). We were feeling very relaxed and successful after a busy few days. It felt great having two stags down for Jake, we could just relax and check out any new stags now. There's no real pressure with hunting, only the pressure we put on ourselves, but I want the people around me to have fun and succeed, and that had certainly happened so now I could relax.

We didn't want to make a stalk on our planned stag with the evening katabatic coming down. With what little time we had before dark we stayed around camp and looked over only two deer, which was fine by us with a horribly early morning in the offing.

Up long before dawn we headed up. It was a steep ridge and an annoying amount of altitude gain given we were going to have to lose it all again on the other side, but the crumbly rock slides meant sidling was out of the question.

Despite the aches from the previous day, and the bleary eyes from the 4am start (that got some grumbles from the great stag hunter in the sleeping bag next to me), we were full of excitement as we poked over into the target gully.

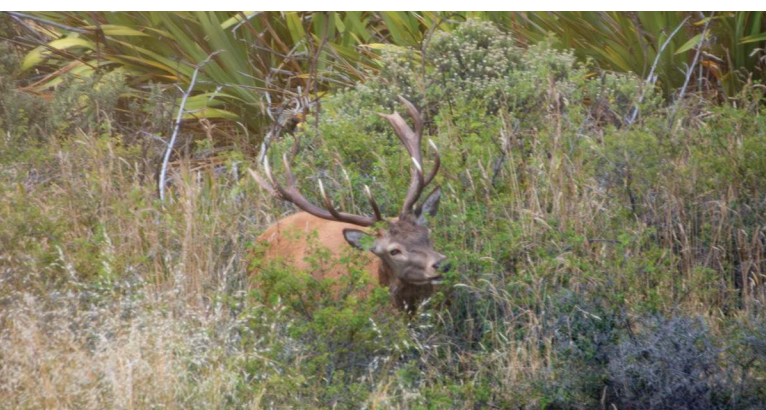
Before long we found the tell-tale rust red glow of a Red stag in early morning light. It wasn't our big boy, but we hadn't scented the area and we'd found deer – win. Eventually we found four stags in the morning gloom and then finally spotted the big fella. Quite early on we could tell he was just a young stag with a short but heavy head as he sparred with his mates. **We knew none of them were shooters so it was time to put the rifle down and grab the camera.**

We carefully slithered down the hill in full view, snaking behind scrub and tussock. Getting within a hundred yards was easy, getting under that was much more difficult. On a stunning clear autumn morning you could hear every footfall. We could even hear the stags chewing. Down on my belly, attempting to juggle two cameras, I tried to slide as quietly as possible but an unseen stag out to my right caught me out in the open. Staring at each other with wide eyes for what seemed like a full minute, he eventually broke contact, sprinting over to his mates. The four stags heaved their fat bodies as

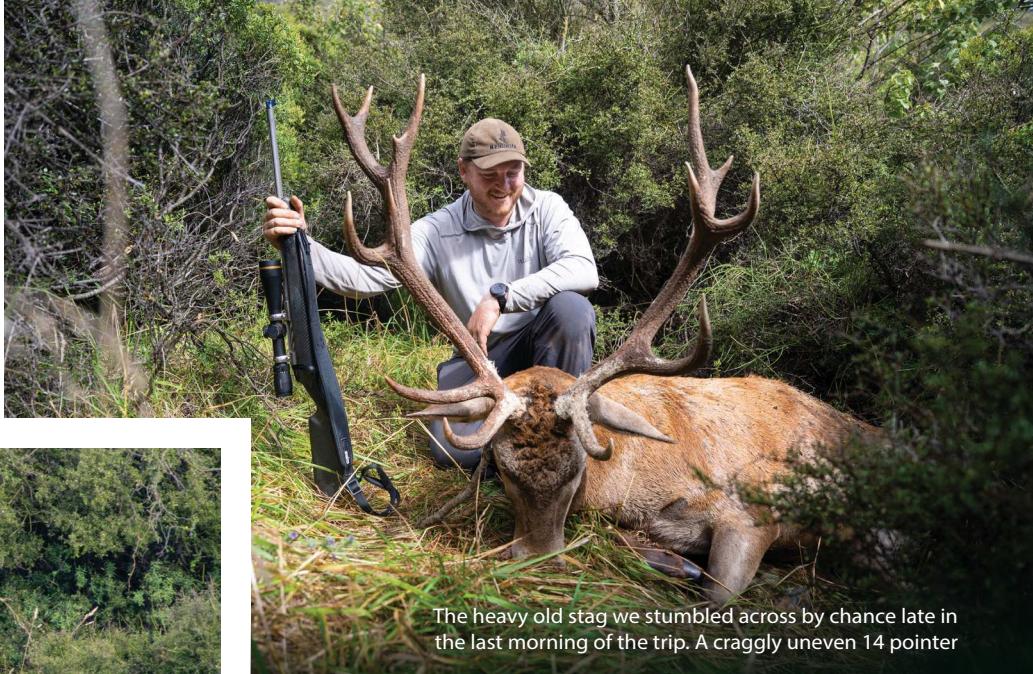
propped up outside the tent. Before long we roused ourselves, made coffee, and packed up before sliding underneath crushing packs and beginning the stagger to the valley floor.

My knees were on the verge of buckling the whole way down, and as the scorching sun rose the heat became intense. **Baking in the strange, unique southern Marlborough rock the sweat poured off us – and it was late March!** The roar was a week or two away, supposedly. The heat built to sauna temperatures as we made the river and had to push through sweltering sweet briar and long summer grass without a breath of wind. The seeds stuck to the sweat and the still air was like an oven. Finally, finally! We rounded the millionth bend and beheld our hut, where we had stashed a few luxuries on the flight in like a cold Corona cooling in the river.

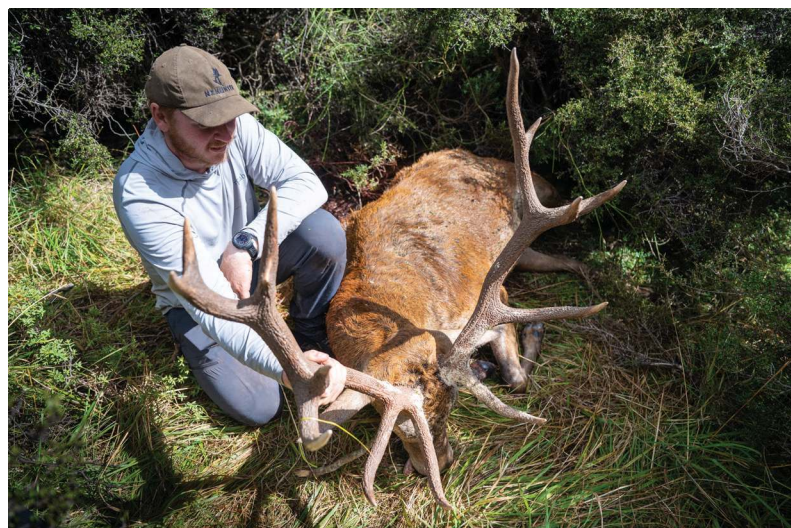
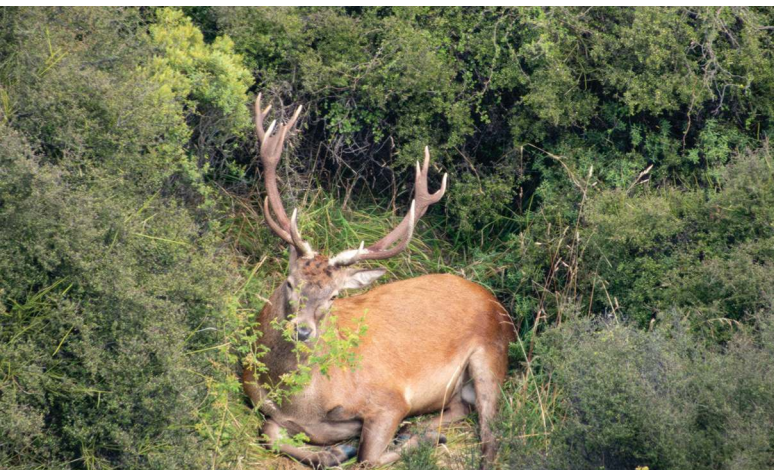
We whiled away a couple of hours in the afternoon heat, braving the ice cold river, cooling down and frying some of the incredible steak from Jake's stags. All washed down with a very refreshing beer.



The very promising young 11 pointer we spied from across the catchment



The heavy old stag we stumbled across by chance late in the last morning of the trip. A craggly uneven 14 pointer



fast as they could out of the catchment. We had a good chuckle watching their tongues hanging out before they'd reached the first ridge, the usually fleet and majestic Red stags were looking a little fat after enjoying their summer a bit too much.

Content, Jake and I enjoyed a lovely brew sitting in the sun by a mountain stream, thinking the trip was over but entirely happy with what we had achieved.

We climbed out of the little hidden basin as the sun rose over it. As we glassed in to the next catchment Jake spotted a stag down low. With time on our hands we stopped to have a good look at him, but he was just another middle-aged 10 pointer. We spotted a more mature looking 11 pointer making his way down too, so we decided to up sticks and move to a small promontory that covered the whole valley.

I got to the lookout before Jake and sat down to glass below us into the new country. Immediately I spotted a rich red body sunning itself with some dead scrub behind it. It was huge bodied, so I eagerly brought the glass up to my eyes and nearly dropped them when I realised the scrub was antler.

I turned around and madly waved to Jake to get over here. I could see he was an enormous, deep-chested, heavy-faced mature stag. After Jake's shooting I had some concerns about the zero on the 28 Nosler so I didn't want to take the shot from 500 yards. We backed off and circled lower, with the only option to get to 250 – a little further into the danger zone

than I wanted but the katabatic should keep our scent contained. As we crested the rise the stag was watching our position, he must have heard a rock rolling from us. He was alert, not spooked, but it was still making me nervous!

Despite my high heart rate the 28 Nosler had no trouble at that range. The stag was down at the first shot, and I heaved a sigh of relief while Jake danced his usual celebrations. With smiles all round we eagerly set off down to him, conveniently ignoring all of the altitude we were losing.

On closer inspection the stag was everything I thought he was, a super heavy 14 pointer, with 8 on one side and 6 on the other. He had heavy pearling, and immense, low coronets. Soren later aged him at 8, the same as Jake's stag.

If the antlers were impressive, so was the body. Jake's 13 was still the fattest stag I've ever seen, but this had to be the biggest. He was a colossal animal. The chest looked a metre deep and he would've made a regular stag look like a fawn next to him. In fact we measured his skull length later at 43.5cm, 3.5cm longer than Fiona's Wapiti bull! This made for a massive butchery session, and an even more massive pack. It was outrageous, and looking up at the ridge we had to cross I pulled out

the InReach to requested a later pick up! Of course South Pacific Heli were outrageously accommodating.

100 yards in to the climb I was blowing like a carthorse. The sun had reached our shaded valley now, and it beamed off the red rock and drew sweat from me like wringing out a wet sponge. It was a back-breaking step by step grunt up typical brutal Marlborough scree. It had a hard base and pebbly stones over top, meaning you could only use about an inch of your boot. With my 110 kilos augmented by 50 odd kilos of venison it made for precarious going in what was shaping up to be a scorcher.

By the time we reached the top I was bugged, and messaged the pilot again to politely ask if we could collect the meat on the flight out. They replied with "No worries!". With a bit more spring in our step Jake and I made a more leisurely return to the hut, packed up, and snoozed in the shade until the giant Eurocopter appeared in the stream. **After a quick stop-off on the ridge to collect the meat we were winging our way back to Kaikoura.**





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GOOD THINGS TAKE TIME

WRITTEN BY ~ JARROD MCLAUCHLAN

I HAVE TO ADMIT, BEING WITH THIS CREW MADE ME FEEL OUT OF SHAPE AND OLD, AND THE STORY THAT FOLLOWS MAY RESONATE WITH SOME READERS. AFTER A FEW YEARS OF FAILED BALLOT APPLICATIONS, WE MANAGED TO SNAG A BLOCK IN PERIOD TWO OF 2020. BAGS WERE PACKED AND READY TO GO.





Zac getting in close on a nice young bull up in one of the head basins we glassed on days three and four

Then the Covid lockdown announcement was made and the rest of the plan was cancelled. Another miss followed in 2021, but 2022 had us land another block

Just six weeks out my hunting buddy rang to tell me he had dislocated his knee, so the towel was thrown in again. I was a tad gutted, but I knew this would only make the experience sweeter once I eventually touched down in one of the Fiordland Wapiti blocks


For the 2023 ballot application, I joined up with a different crew, comprising some keen young savage lads, Oscar (aka big Turk team leader), Zac, and Kim. With the big Turk team leader taking care of the admin this time round, he managed to land us a block. We were stoked to see the successful application email roll into our inbox, informing us that we had snagged a fringe block to the core Wapiti area during period three, from 9 – 18 April. As the trip approached, we finally got our plans in order after more yarns than discussions on the group chat. It's always a balance between what the weather will allow us to do and what we want to do. We split the block with some top lads, also from Nelson. We had the top end and they had the lake end. The forecast was looking average, not bad but not great, so we planned our route accordingly, starting low and working up high as the weather eventually cleared towards the tail end.

On the day of the briefing, I flew into Queenstown and met Oscar and Zac there; we travelled into Te Anau and caught up with Kim, who drove in from Dunedin, got a feed, and hit the briefing to lock in our permit. We did leave finding accommodation a bit too late. Being Easter weekend and school holidays, it was as difficult as trying to solve the Da Vinci Code. However, at 9pm, a room became

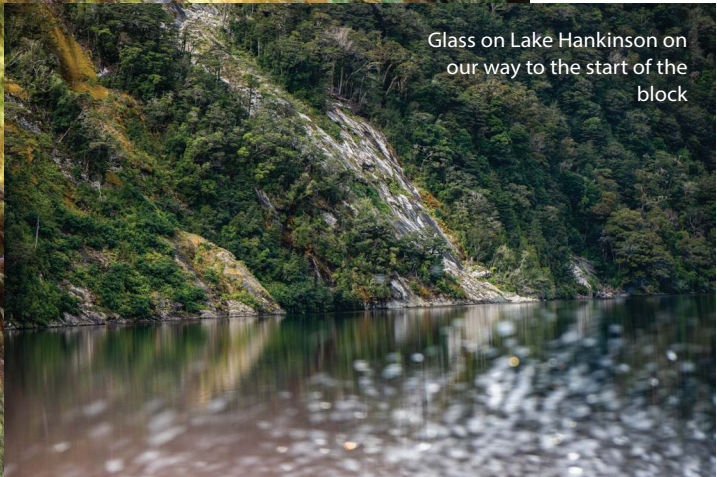
available and we quickly grabbed it. The next morning rolled around, and it was a real cracker. The buzz of choppers taking off had us eager to get going. Our ride this time round was by water taxi at 11.30am, and we made our way out to the boat ramp ready to roll. As the old boy of the trip, I had definitely packed far too much gear, but with the possibility of several days tent-bound, who wouldn't go wild on the snacks and coffees? A quick trip had us at the start of our block, and with a front rolling in the following morning, we set off up into our main creek system. We had some info on the best way to enter the creek and not to get bluffed out, which made the few hours of climbing a much easier than if we didn't have that intel, so cheers to the Backlanz boys for passing on that info. The lads weren't there for a haircut, and they blasted off up the hill. I consider myself decently hill-fit, but these lads are next level, and although they never said, me and my overweight pack were holding them up. In no time we got to our first glassing point to look upon the true left tops, and it wasn't long before we picked up two Red hinds, then a young bull.

We then heard our first bugle for the trip, which was also the first bugle heard by Zac and me. This was awesome, and we could finally see the country that we would hunt for the next eight days. We watched a clearing in the valley floor until dark then went down to find a campsite. Satisfied with the first day and hearing a few bugles and roars, and fizzing for what was to come, we hit the tents and made a plan for the morning.

On day two, we woke to a slight drizzle that, as expected, made its way through the bush. We packed up camp, and set off up the valley floor, glassing the nearby tops through breaks in the cloud. We had some action with a bull and a Red stag in the bush - Kim and I got in on the stag, which was a cool experience, but I never saw the bull. We planned to camp up high on a terrace to give us the best shot for some good glassing while the weather was unsettled for the next few days. We rolled up to the planned campsite late afternoon, which overlooked one of the main basins we wanted to watch. Unexpectedly, the weather broke, and we had a pretty solid afternoon of glassing; we picked up a few cows and hinds down in the basin, and we were also treated to some nearby bugles



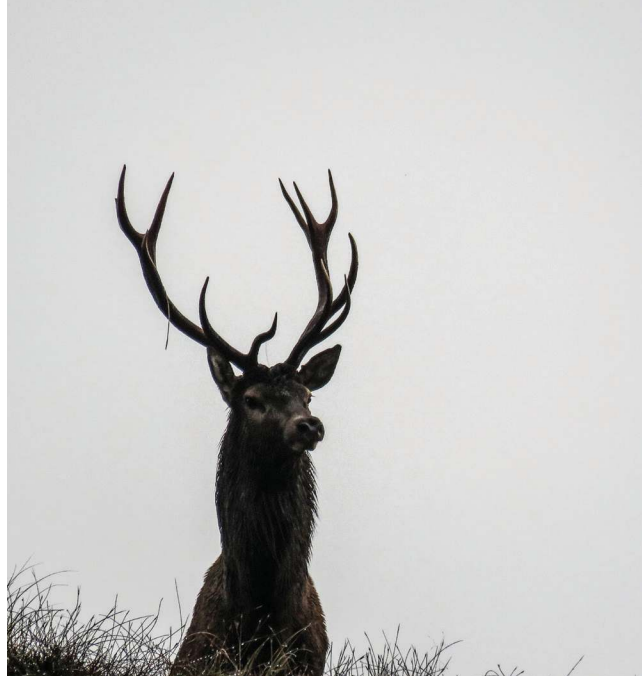
Kim up at our second campsite, with the saddle to the Lugar Burn in the background



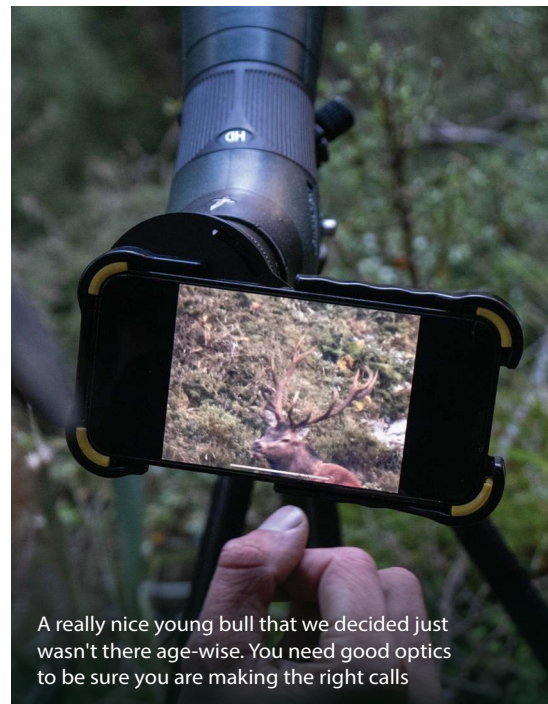
Glass on Lake Hankinson on our way to the start of the block



The bull we spotted from camp



A cool encounter with a kea as we were trying to locate bugling bulls down in a tight gully



A really nice young bull that we decided just wasn't there age-wise. You need good optics to be sure you are making the right calls

and roars, which got us fired up. The stoke levels were high for the coming days, but we battened down the hatches and prepared for a wet night as per the forecast.

The rain came during the night and cleared to patchy drizzle mid-morning on day three so, with the kit on we started glassing. The wet weather had the animals going hard. **I was mucking around as usual, and just as I was about to leave the tent and meet up with the boys at our usual spot, I turned around and looked up a bit confused.** I spotted this massive set of antlers on a rocky outcrop about 50 metres away. All I could see were strong tines as he moved his head side to side to work out what he had stumbled upon. After hand signals to the boys they got in position for a look, and we got a gun ready just in case he was of age, but we put him around five to seven years with

a lack of length but 12 very strong tines. We shot him only with the cameras as he hung around for a while, and I'm pretty sure we were the first people he had seen. This isn't the last time this stag appears in this story. A few more animals were spotted in between intermittent drizzle and we called it a day once the last of the light disappeared.

The weather was similar on day four. Oscar went for a glass down into the small grass flats of the nearby basin at daybreak and picked up a really nice stag/bull. It looked Red but certainly had some Wapiti traits. We thought he was not of age but later learned that he was a bull of about seven plus years, sporting 12 strong points. Later that night we heard stags and a bull going hard in the nearby bush, which was one of the wildest things I've ever heard. With the low cloud, the roars and bugles sounded insane echoing up through the basin. That pretty much

wrapped up day four.

On day five our plans were loose, as the weather could have gone either way, but it was still clagged in, raining on and off. We decided to push up high to get to our next campsite in hopes of catching the fine weather the following day. **Packing up in the wet we pushed up into the cloud, leaving the roaring stags in the close by basin.** A quick climb had us at the top ridge that split us and the neighbouring block. We pitched the tents, and the boys got a game of rugby cranking with one of the lad's puffer jackets as there wasn't much glassing to be done mid-afternoon. The rain had now stopped, and with a stiff breeze that was moving the cloud fast through the nearby saddle, it was drying our gear out, which was top-notch. We got a few small glassing windows that allowed us to see the amazing scenery down in the nearby block. We hit the tents in hopes of

a fine morning and fine weather for the remainder of the trip.

Day six dawned a cracker, still with some low cloud but a big improvement. We got to work glassing the main head basin, not much was turned over to be fair. Kim reckoned that it might be a lack of feed, even though it looked nice, and I think he was right. We did pick up a stag that was roaring down low in the basin. Through the spotter, he looked decent, so once he worked out of sight we hoped to catch up with him later for sure. We soaked up the sun, taking in the unreal scenes; it was special to be up high in such a remote and wild place.

The plan was to pack up camp and walk down the head basin to lower country, camp on a high knob, and then hunt the bush stags for the last full day. We also hoped to set eyes on the stag of the morning.

A few hours into the walk, we were in the bush when one of the lads heard a bark, and luckily, we were at a small break in the trees. The boys spied the morning's stag a few hundred metres away on the other face. We set up the spotter, and he looked bloody good. Lacking height once again but he looked really respectable with some age. After 15-20 minutes of deciding what to do, the penny dropped. This was the same stag we had seen from camp on day two and he had moved a fair distance. The first time we saw him he was soaking wet, and now that he was dry he looked a little different, with his tuft of hair around the coronets making his pedicle height look different than when his hair was wet and flat. That was a good lesson to be honest. We left him for the second time and moved onto the knob where we set up camp. Right before dark we managed to get a nice bull out onto a slip, and although we assessed him as being pretty old and with a nice set of antlers, we weren't sure that he was old enough to warrant taking him when we weren't fully sold on his headgear. It turns out it was the right move; he was around seven years old, so he's still got a chance of getting a bit better. It was so cool watching him rip out of the bush bugling.

Day six over, and it was a beautiful evening. The plan was to make our way down to the first night's campsite and hunt the animals in the bush the next day.

It was another bluebird on day seven, and we decided to split to make the most of the last full day. The boys were going to climb high on the true left and hunt the tops, and I was going to climb up and glass into the first basin we had glassed on day two, on the off-chance the sun had brought out some new animals. None showed themselves, so I headed

off downstream to see if the bush stags were still going for it. The boys absolutely sent it up this face and got up to the tops in no time, eating the notoriously tough Fiordland country for breakfast. It was very quiet downstream, so I took my time for several hours not seeing any animals. The boys had a similar sort of day but were fizzing about their the mission.

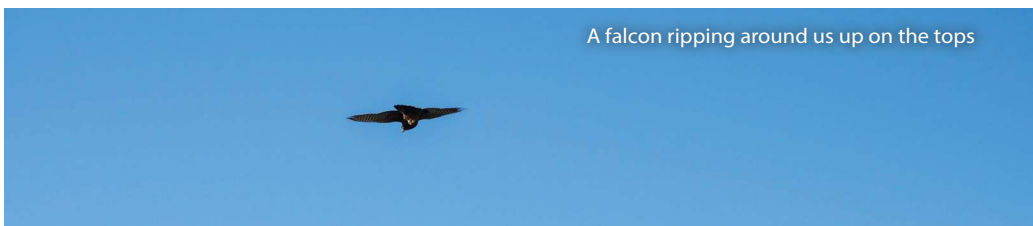
We met up back down in the valley and made our way to our last campsite under headlamps. Although the trip was winding down it was not over yet, and we came across a kiwi which, for most of us, was the first time. We went hard on the food that evening, spun some yarns then walked back out to the hut for the boat

ride the next morning to finish off our eight-day Wapiti hunt.

It was a really special trip - we had a blast and saw some super nice young animals. Cheers to the young lads for inviting me in and cheers to everyone who reads the yarn.



The young bull we saw again from camp in a different angle



A falcon ripping around us up on the tops



The bull that was a fair bit older than we initially thought, he was a strong 12 and bugling well



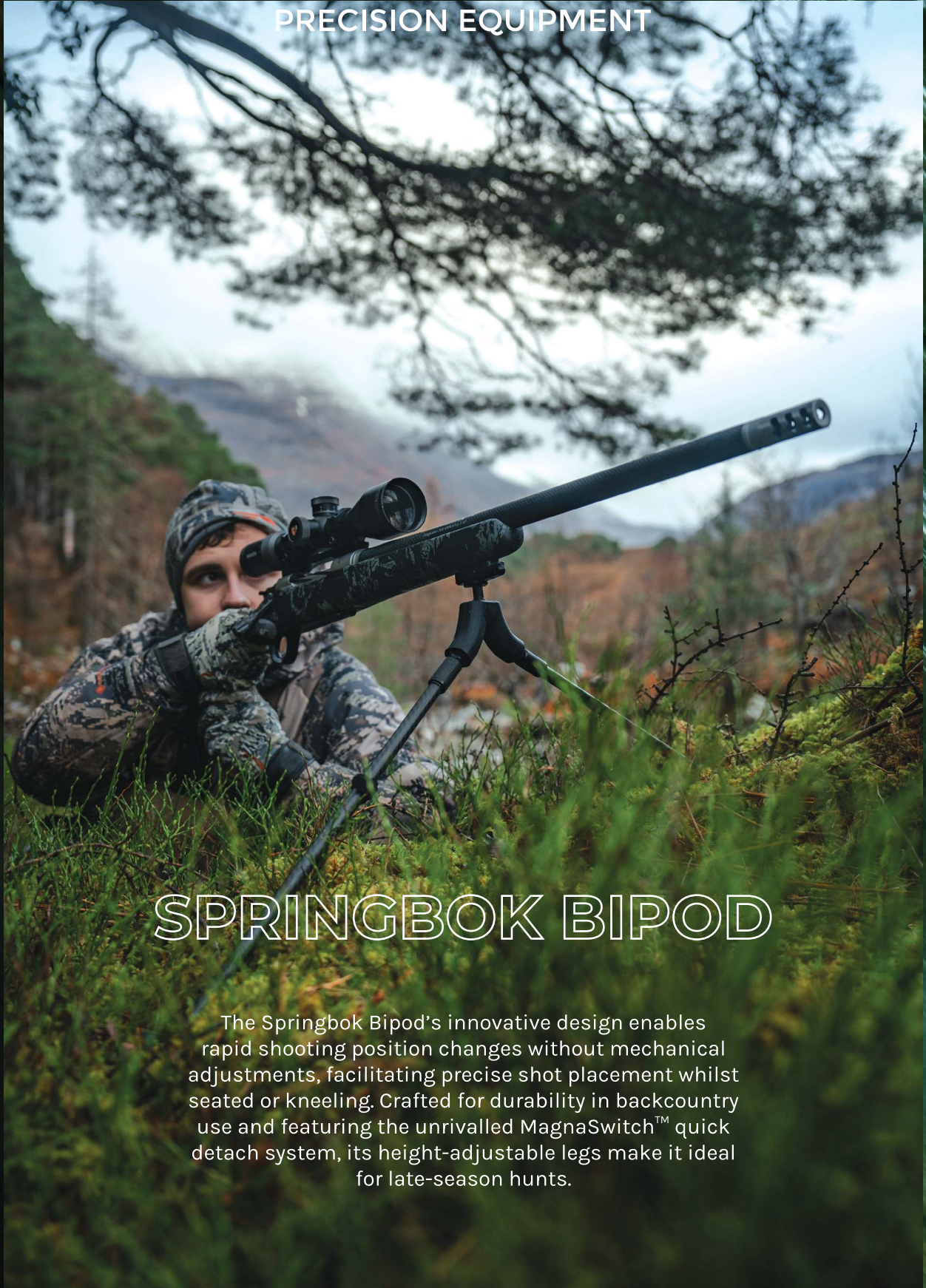
The bull we saw on the second to last night that popped out right on dark, we made the call to leave him, he was impressive

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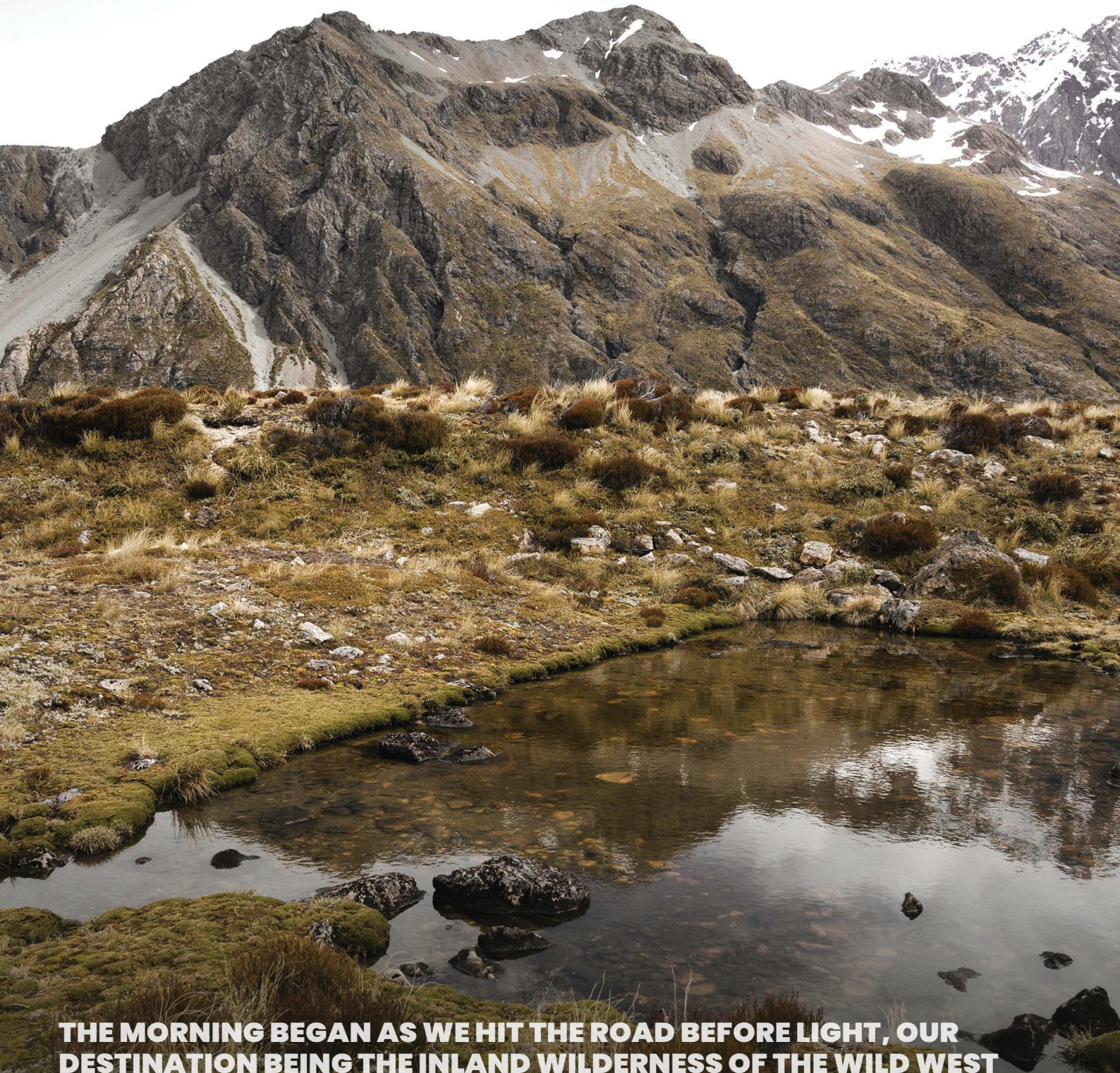
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WRITTEN BY ~ RACHELLE GRANT

THE NANNY OF ALL CHAMOIS



THE MORNING BEGAN AS WE HIT THE ROAD BEFORE LIGHT, OUR DESTINATION BEING THE INLAND WILDERNESS OF THE WILD WEST COAST. WE ARRIVE AT OUR DESTINATION AT THE CRACK OF DAWN JUST BEFORE THE SUN BEGAN TO SLOWLY ASCEND OVER THE RIDGES. IT WAS A COOL, CRISP MORNING WITH THE CONDENSATION OF OUR BREATH CATCHING THE FIRST MORNING LIGHT



A curious encounter

As the sun began to rise, a low-hanging fog had shrouded the valley tops providing minimal visibility other than the valley floor

We contemplated an alternative destination but decided to take the chance and set out on our journey. Our path led us upstream, tracing the contours of the landscape, each step gaining in altitude. After a few hours of trekking, the fog finally dissipated in the sun's rays and the valley revealed itself.

The scenery that lay before us was mesmerising and we knew today was going to be spectacular - animal or not.

A few hours into our journey, with numerous stops to scan the steep faces in search of an animal, our persistence paid off. Finally, an elusive chamois revealed itself, perched atop a ridge, the peculiar outline catching my eye. I grabbed Ryan's arm in excitement and whispered "look up there", and retrieving the binoculars, we confirmed the sighting. The chamois was approximately 1800 metres away yet in just an instant, the animal disappeared from view. **Despite the brief encounter, we managed to get some snaps on the long-range camera.**

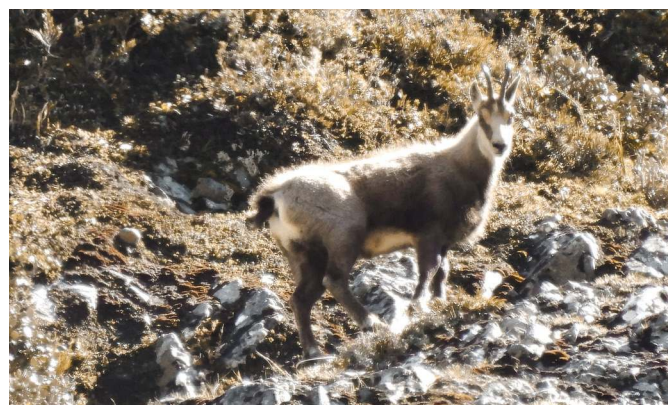
The silhouette hinted at it being a mature animal, the tips of its horns reaching well above its ears, leaving us intrigued about its age and size.

We pressed on, determined to find a suitable crossing point to get across the river to the face of the animal, our

sights firmly set on the elusive creature. Crossing over, we made our way towards a steep scree face, startling a family of chamois, mere metres away hidden in the crest of a gut. Among them stood a mature buck, nanny, and two playful young kids. The family observed us curiously for a brief moment before retreating into the rocky bluffs and disappearing from view.

We continued our ascent, hoping to avoid disturbing the chamois we initially spotted. As we ascended to the peak, the landscape unfolded before us, revealing breathtaking views of the encompassing ranges.

A small plateau on top of the ridge was an opportunity to settle for a bite to eat. During this break Ryan pulled out his binoculars to check the surrounding faces and caught sight of another group of chamois, basking in the sun on a rocky ledge approximately 750 metres away. We pulled out our cameras to take a more careful look, and saw a family trio consisting of a buck, nanny and kid. We estimated the buck horn length to be between 8-9 inches and the animal at seven to eight years of age. There was a moments contemplation about whether to take this animal but we decided to leave the mob undisturbed and pursue the chamois we'd first spotted.

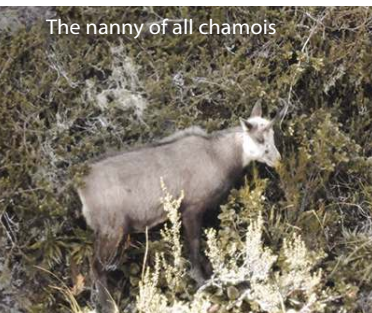


Following the contour of the ridge, we steadily closed the gap, aiming to approach the location where the first chamois had been spotted earlier. Yet it remained elusive. Peering down into a gut, our perseverance was finally rewarded as we spotted the animal grazing among a tussock clearing between some shaded rocks. With the vantage point now much closer, we were both breath taken at the sight before us —a weathered nanny, bearing the telltale signs of age and experience, with all the markings of a prized trophy.

Preparing for the decisive moment, I steadied the gun on the rocks, trying to balance the bipod legs on the schist, which proved to be a challenge in itself. Once I felt like I had a comfortable resting position, I took aim. I whispered "ready Ryan?" Ryan responded "yip, camera is rolling" I then squeezed off on the trigger. "Bullseye! Straight through the front shoulder!" The chamois fell, rolling down the scree lifeless, and I was stoked!. Bursting with adrenaline and a sense of accomplishment, we descend into the gut to retrieve the fallen animal.



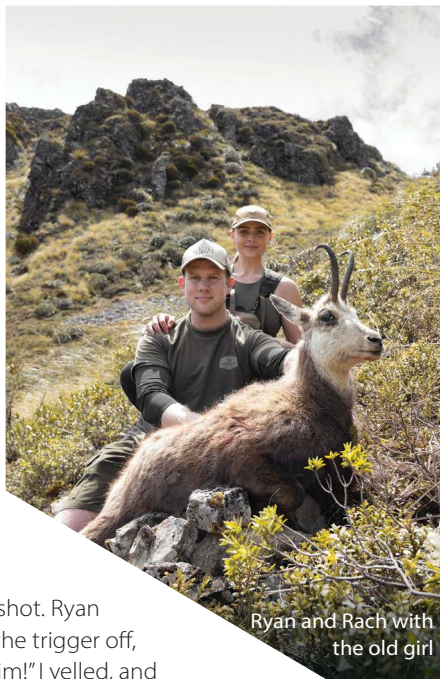
From rivers to ranges



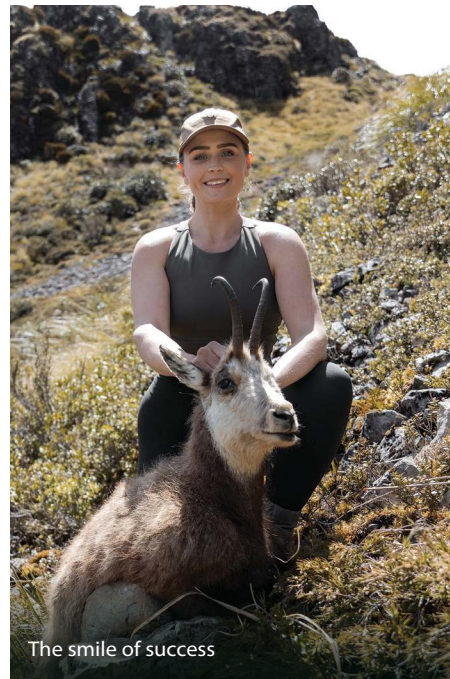
The nanny of all chamois



Showing her age



Ryan and Rach with the old girl



The smile of success

Amidst the rugged terrain and hidden beneath a tussock bush we found her—a magnificent old chamois with stacked age rings, a greying coat, disappearing facial stripes, failing eyesight, and the shedding of winter fur without regeneration, revealing only the aging and weathered skin beneath. A testament to a life lived amidst the harsh and challenging environment of the rugged west coast.

Bringing home such a distinguished animal brought an indescribable feeling—a sense of connection to the wild and an acknowledgement of the circle of life thriving in our very own backyard. It is a hunt that has etched its significance in our memories as an experience that will never be forgotten.

Little did we know the day held more surprises yet to come. With plenty of daylight remaining, we ventured towards a nearby tarn, taking a moment to capture the serenity of the surroundings. As I sat in awe at the picturesque scenery, Ryan set off, his keen eye searching for further chamois. Fortune favoured his exploration, as a mature buck had appeared and was making his way over a large waterfall and back towards us. As the buck drew closer, his age and mature characteristics became evident—his horns tall above his ears, bearing the weight of age and experience.

We geared up for a shot, me steadying the camera and Ryan finding a comfortable position to line up on. Ryan pulled out his range finder “yep, 372 metres”, and dialled his scope. Once ready we waited for

the buck to present us with a broadside shot. Ryan squeezed the trigger off, “smoked him!” I yelled, and the chamois tumbled down a bluff, dangerously close to hurtling over the edge. Miraculously, the chamois was slowed by patches of tussocks amidst the scree, coming to a stop. We rushed over to retrieve him, navigating the challenging terrain to reach the fallen animal. Ryan was grinning ear to ear, pleased with the size and age. He pulled out the tape measure and ran it over the horns “9 ¼ inches, not a bad buck at all”.

Skinning the animal, we took meat, and its head for a trophy to remember. Both of us were thrilled with the success of our hunts, and embarked on our return journey as the sun began its descent. It had been a day that exceeded all expectations, a testament of how lucky

we really are to have these opportunities right on our doorstep.

Once home, when cleaning the heads for the trophy shelf, we discovered the nanny chamois had a noticeably unusual hole in her skull above her left eye, evidence of a tumour that had silently grown over the years. **This served as a reminder of the resilience of these animals and some of the harsh challenges they face in their natural habitat.**



One last look



The buck that was out of luck

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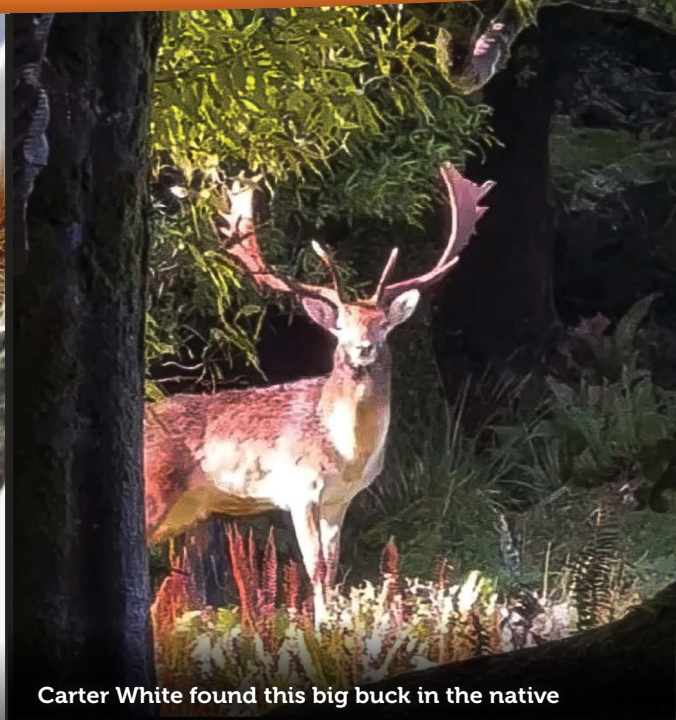


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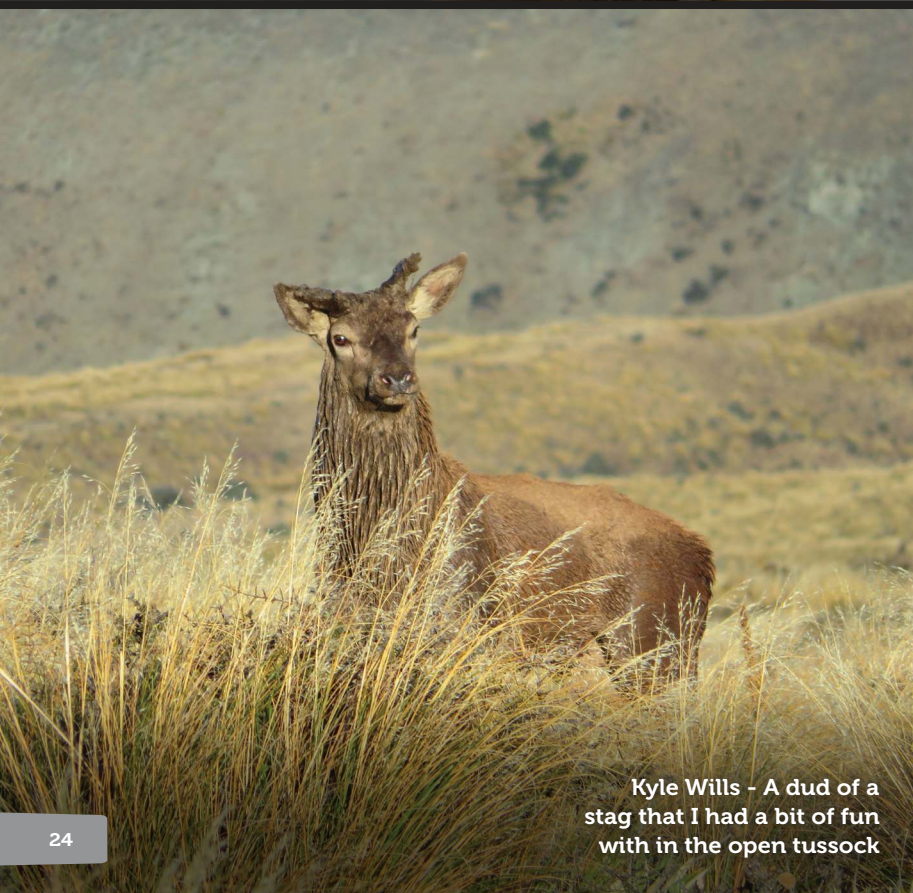


WINNER

Up close and personal with a
buck in the snow - Rueben Jones



Carter White found this big buck in the native



Kyle Wills - A dud of a
stag that I had a bit of fun
with in the open tussock



A family group of chamois
photographed by Matt Brake



Caught these two Fallow deer that
were about one hundred meters
away - by Toby Meares



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THE AMAZING BASIN

WRITTEN BY
GLEN PYLE

I'm a bush hunter through and through, and love to hunt on public land. This can create some epic adventures. The most recent trip kicked off with a 3am departure from Te Kowhai, Hamilton with my son Quinn (15) in tow

On arriving at the carpark for access to the Kaimanawas, we threw our backpacks on then set off on a 5½ hour hike to the first campsite. This particular spot had yielded some good results over the years but we were prepared with campsites B & C in different areas if the first one was occupied.

The bonus about the roar and packing in light was the chance of seeing the odd animal. We passed up on a young 8-pointer Sika stag which was within 10 metres, plus a young hind also in our crosshairs. We spooked about three or four more animals along the way, but other than that, it was an uneventful trip in.

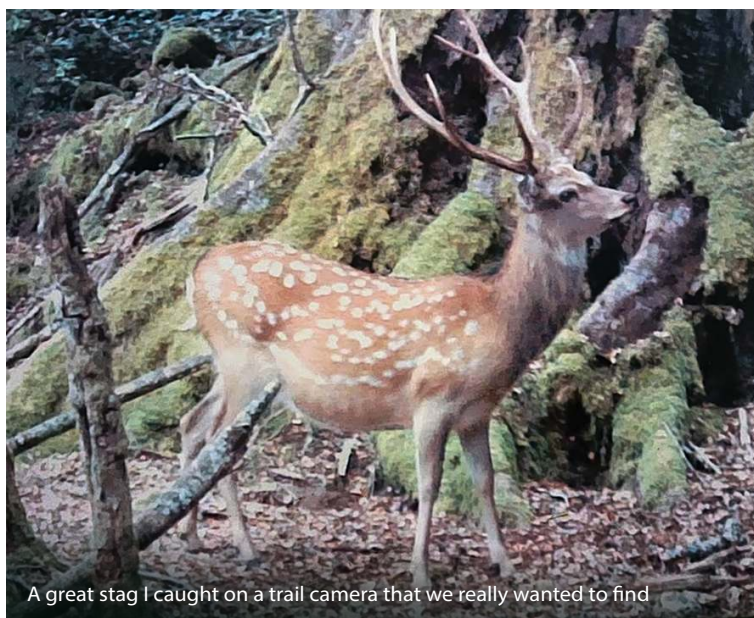
Dropping over the top of the leading ridge and within 300 metres or so from our hopeful campsite, we encountered a

roaring stag. We estimated he was at least 200 metres away up the valley in some thick bush. I pulled out my trusty cow horn and gave a call but it sounded a bit sickly! In fact, I only attracted a smallish animal that only Quinn saw!

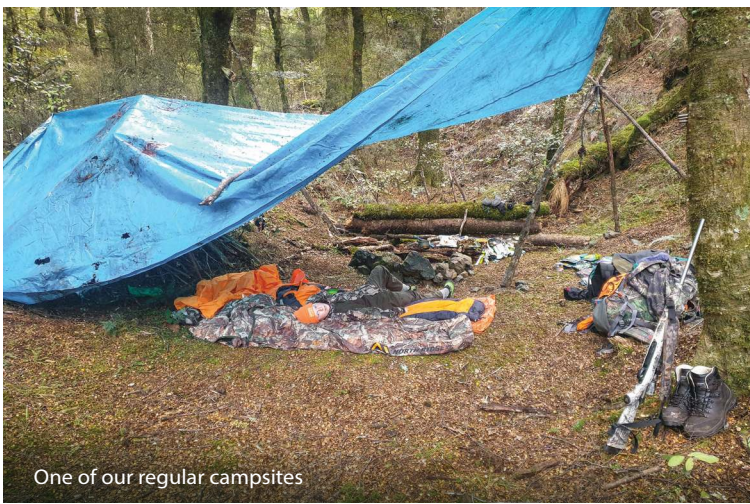
On a positive note, I told him, it was looking promising that we had the basin to ourselves. We arrived to an empty campsite 15 minutes later. With a bleak looking forecast ahead it was a relief to get camp set up and keep everything dry.

With some great grub in our bellies, we made a plan for the afternoon. It wasn't to chase the roaring stags, believe it or not,

but to head to the other side of the basin where Quinn had shot a seven-pointer the previous year. I had a promising pic of a good Sika stag, too. This particular stag had eluded me for more than just a few haircuts! Heading off up the small bush ridge we managed to see another small 8-pointer near a 4-pointer and spiker. A stag then let rip on the parallel ridge to our left. Since we were unsure if it was a Sika stag or a person, we decided to continue tracking until we reached the top. Unfortunately, we set off alarms everywhere when we came across three



A great stag I caught on a trail camera that we really wanted to find



One of our regular campsites



Quinn with one of my stags from a trip to the amazing basin when he was younger

hinds near the top. Feeling our cover was blown we decided to head back down the parallel ridge. It seemed highly likely that this was the mature stag we were looking for. We came across some fresh ruts which encouraged me to give another roar. There was no real response, so we decided to head down the ridge and back to camp. **It now seemed that we were only able to spook animals with another two vacating at high speed from the area.**

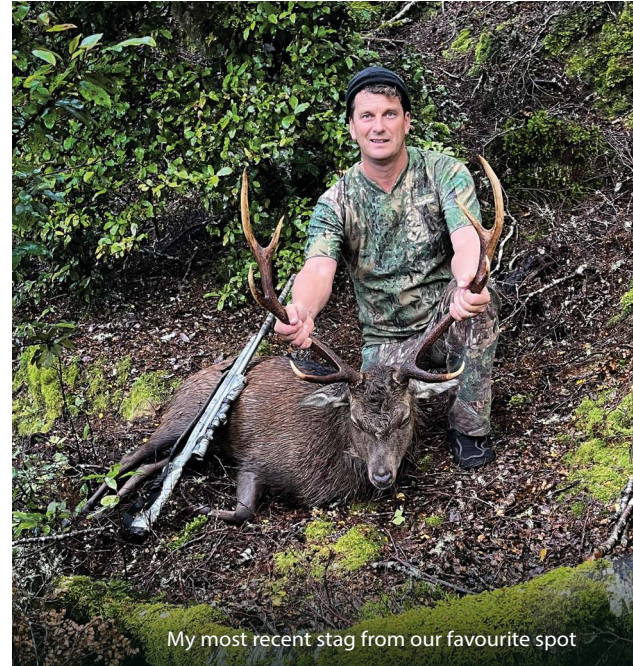
Just when all hope seemed to be lost, Quinn excitedly spotted a pair of antlers above the scrub, but before I could eyeball him he took off up the hill. When he reached a clearing we managed to identify him as a mature 8-pointer, probably about 160 D/S plus. "This would be a great candidate for Quinn's second Sika stag", I thought to myself.

Back at camp later in the evening the stags started to go to town roaring. It's quite a large basin and we were able to identify the roars of four to five different stags. "A promising day ahead" I told Quinn with a big grin - he was buzzing too.

That night the new tent was put through its paces with what sounded like about 30mm plus of rain. Needless to say, it was a very long night.

The next morning, with all our scent washed away, I decided to give Quinn a go at the mature stag we had seen the previous evening. Making the gun safe (no bullet in the chamber) and giving him clear instructions to clearly identify the animal and not to take any shot without permission from me, I handed him the gun and followed behind. **We laid eyes on another six animals but alas, no stag.**

After breakfast/lunch and a wee nap we made plans to check out the first stag we had seen upon arrival. Up until this point, my roaring had had a pretty mixed response, and the young fella was starting to give me stick. We left camp a little early, knowing they would probably still be bedded down (2.30pm) but what the heck we thought ... big



My most recent stag from our favourite spot

mistake! Within 200 metres of leaving camp we put up a really good Sika stag. I mean really BIG. This guy had three hinds with him, which we inadvertently put off in the opposite direction. He roared



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Quinn with his first stag



My nephew with his first stag, taken from that same special place

and whistled at 200 metres away then a couple of minutes later we guessed that he had now travelled about 500 metres up to the head of the valley. **After a few more minutes he seemed more concerned about losing his hinds (roaring) than us!** We didn't stand much chance of stalking him through the thick bush where he had just travelled, so we formulated a new plan. This was to head up the ridge, along the top and drop in on or behind him. We were both amped. Within 100 metres or so, we ran into a satellite stag - fortunately he didn't give away our position. About half an

hour had passed since the first encounter. "Now, he should be about 200 metres below us," I told Quinn. We had to stop for a breather. It was time to give him a roar - it seemed to be a pretty decent area at this particular time.

We could see approximately 60 metres in most directions underneath the canopy. Of course Quinn wanted to eyeball things with the scope! After five minutes with no response we decide to head down and give the big boy a crack. Gathering up things and Quinn giving back the gun, I gave one more glance down the hill. To my surprise, a stag was heading up to

our position. He looked pretty decent. So, after some deliberation, I decided to take the shot. It echoed through the valley and he was down. This was a completely different stag from the one we were chasing, but I was still bloody happy - definitely smaller but a nice character stag anyway. After taking the head and boning the meat out, we headed towards camp. We were lucky enough to see another 11 deer in total. **The next morning we decided to head home early as we had enough meat for one trip... "until next time....the big guy can wait"**



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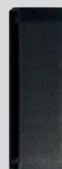
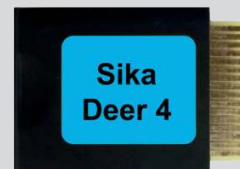
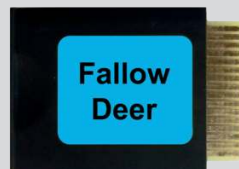
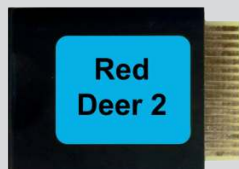
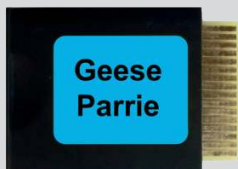
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50 ROAR TIPS

FROM THE NZ HUNTER TEAM

1. Mature stags that are holding hinds will not always come into a roar until you get right into their territory. When right in close, turn your head away when you roar to make yourself sound further away or even just break the odd stick and stay quiet and watch and wait.

2. Cover the ground at a steady pace roaring regularly into catchments. Let your voice do the walking. Always be aware that a stag could come in to you silently while doing this so keep your eyes peeled.

3. Gain a bit of height to help hearing and so your roars carry further. Keep away from rivers and streams and any noise that will stop you hearing roaring stags.

4. Big stags can turn up on river flats at first and last light so check these out on your way to and from a hunt. Keep your scent off them though.

5. Where possible, target stags that are roaring rather than stalking wallows etc.

6. If two stags are roaring really well, sometimes it is better not to make any noise and just stalk in.

7. When roaring in a stag, make sure you are concealed and with a good view of your shooting area with reasonably clear shooting lanes, especially downwind of you. That is often the direction a stag will sneak

in from. Have your rifle up ready (pointed safely with bolt up) and keep movement to a minimum.

8. Watch out for hinds!!

9. Stags can show up anywhere, especially subordinate stags.

10. The first stag you see is not always the dominant stag, they are often surrounded by ringers.

11. If it is a young stag with a head that will be a ripper in a couple of years, let it go. If you need the meat shoot a yearling or a hind.

12. It is safer to stay together when roaring up a stag with a mate. One can roar and the other can take the shot. If the stag is cagey and won't come in, then the two hunters can work together. One stays back and roars and the other sneaks in. The roaring hunter must stay put and not even load his rifle if he has one (which he shouldn't) under any circumstances!

13. Always presume it is a person until definitely identified as a deer. Watch out for life like recordings that can fool both stags and hunters. Identify your target!!

14. Hunt the mid level spurs that flatten off.

15. If after a trophy stag, research what heads have

come out of various areas. History has a habit of repeating itself!

16. In tight bush on a stag roaring well, only move when he roars. It will help cover any sound you make.

17. If hunting open country, keep your scent out of the good areas and watch from a distance.

18. Roar lots early in the roar – when stags perhaps have yet to find a hind. They are more likely to come in if they haven't already got one.

19. During the middle/peak of the roar when stags are likely to have hinds, they will be far less likely to come in, especially if a hind is cycling. Use their replies to pin point their location then stalk in on them.

20. Start with a basic stag moan to see if you get a reply. When you do, begin to work the stag up by intensifying your roars. When in close to a stag and he just won't come to you, try using a hind call. This call can often be far more effective than an actual roar!

21. If a stag replies once or twice then shuts up, stay where you are. More than likely he is quietly sneaking in on you. (We have seen this happen lots).

22. If you know a stag is coming in get ready!! They often come in much faster than you are expecting.

23. When roaring in a stag in the bush look for tops of antlers rather than body. Very often it's the antlers you'll see first.

24. If sneaking in on a stag that won't come to you, watch out for the lesser, outrider satellite stags/spikers.

25. If inexperienced at roaring go out to a deer farm and listen. Try to imitate the sounds.

26. Don't be too ashamed to use an electronic caller, especially on Sika!

27. Where there are hinds there will sooner or later be a stag, but you might have to wait a while for one to begin cycling!

28. Don't use the weather as an excuse. When they are ready to roar they will roar regardless of the weather!

29. The big old boys roar earlier than most expect.

30. If a stag is roaring without you having to keep him going, then don't roar!

31. Never put him off until tomorrow, if he is going well and the wind is suitable, get him now. You never know what will happen with the weather, other hunters etc if you decide to leave him till later.

32. Just because he has stopped roaring doesn't mean he's buggered off. Often a loud "Woof" will get them going again.

33. Don't be afraid to spend time up high in the dark pin pointing roaring stags for the morrow.

34. If you see a good one and muck him up, odds are he will be back in the same place the following year.

35. Look for fresh stag sign, as the stag may not be

far away. Be alert around wallows or tree rubs.

36. Aim to be in the stag's area at first light or last two hours of light.

37. When you get a response, reply back with a similar sounding roar.

38. Use wind to your advantage and close in on stag as quick as possible while he's roaring.

39. Get into within 100-150m from stag and roar again.

40. Shake trees and roar and finish with a grunt ... make it sound like you are in his domain and ready to fight.

41. Don't move and be patient, only moan if you have too otherwise you may give away your position.

42. When you are in your hunting area roar every few minutes as you move along as often a stag will be where you least expect it. Roaring regularly will minimise the chance of walking past a stag or inadvertently walking into one.

43. Regular roaring may alert another hunter that a human mimicking a stag is in the same area.

44. If you hear sound or see movement, shape or colour assume it is another hunter until proven otherwise beyond all doubt. Think about this often during the hunt and remind yourself. When you see an animal assess its gender, age and antlers. If you've taken the time to do that then you've established it isn't a human.

45. Roar from places where you get good coverage over a large area. If there is no wind roar from spurs and ridge tops working your way along, roaring regularly on both sides. If there is wind up top this will make it difficult for your roar to be heard by a stag and to hear an answer from the ridge top. If it is blowing try and climb down out of the wind on the leeward side of the ridge and sidle, roaring as you go. If you do hear a stag then you need to nut out how to approach him into wind.

46. Carrying out a set of antlers or an animal on your back can be perceived as risky as another hunter may think it is a deer walking through the bush. Wearing a high visibility garment is sensible and if you are carrying an animal or head put the garment over the animal. Carry antlers with tips facing downward. It is safer, more comfortable and makes negotiating thicker bush a lot easier.

47. If you are able find out if other hunters are in the same area then do so. Ask at the DOC office or check with land managers. Are there other cars parked nearby and if there is consider going somewhere else.

48. A deep, loud, long and angry roar does not necessarily equate to a bigger stag with the bigger head. Check out the puny roars also.

49. Control buck fever. Know how to recognise it in yourself and have a strategy to counter it. Mine is: "STOP" S top

T ake time to control your emotion

O bserve for as long as it takes to positively ID the target beyond all doubt.

P lace the shot with care

50. And lastly Druncle's tip - take a silly brother in-law or a young nephew with you to carry out your stag!



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West Coast Bound

WRITTEN BY ~ TOM MCKAY

The day had finally arrived. After what seemed like an endless week grinding away I was finally staring down the barrel of another big weekend mission

This particular plan had been in the pipeline for well over a month, but had been hampered by dodgy weather and work commitments. Time was going to be of the essence so I took a day off work to ensure I could give this a decent nudge.

As I slithered through the Haast Pass, I caught glimpses of the sun-struck faces standing up in all their glory; fizz levels were building. After an hour's worth of scratching my truck through what seemed like every shrub species known to man, and avoiding very deep root-infested wheel ruts, I was at my destination. With my swag rolled out, I was pitted for the evening, looking forward to an early morning escapade, which consisted of two immediate river crossings.

I woke to the alarming ring of a hissing possum from a nearby bush and an

uncomfortably heavy dew. On recent missions I had been making a conscious effort to lighten my pack and had discovered that my food department had been packing some serious weight. Breakfast was bleak to say the least, but it provided sufficient energy to pack up shop and slip on my favourite piece of alternative footwear – the almighty Croc.

As I made my way up the riverbed, I quickly decided that the Crocs were doing the job quite nicely, so I continued for the next six kilometres or so.

By the time I reached my designated entry point into the dense bush, it was still reasonably dark and a thick fog was drifting down the valley. With my trusty Crocs stowed away, I ducked into the bush edge, really hoping that the topo map that I had been studying for the previous three weeks was somewhat trustworthy and accurate. Otherwise I could be in for a hellish experience. I am not going to lie; I was well over an hour into my ascent when a recurring thought got the better of me: **is this really**

going to work? Is it really worth it? I was battling the terrain on all levels.

The soft, mossy, and slippery underfoot conditions, in combination with near vertical stints, were making the task far from pleasant. After checking my progress again and discovering I had covered 150 metres of the 1000 metres vertical I was aiming for, my heart sank. I'm not one to back off in these sorts of situations and I had no wish to face the noise of returning two days early from a supposed three-day trip. It was time to put the hammer down and cover some ground.

The motivation of not knowing what potential trophies could be ahead or the extreme scenery that can be experienced on the West Coast is what kept my long legs ticking over for the following three hours. **I was at about 1000 metres altitude when I started noticing extremely fresh deer sign; the bush had thinned out, and the terrain eased.** Suddenly, the air was filled with the scent of a smelly Red stag and, not far from where I was standing, were countless smashed branches, and rotten logs which seemed to be torn to shreds. I sat myself down with a solid field of view just to get my breath back and legs rested with the thought that a deer may wander out at any given time. Sure enough, I

spotted a hind with a young one in tow not far ahead. I let them wander well out of sight and continued on. I could now see glimmers of the sharp rock edges surrounded by open tussock country ahead which was looking very attractive after the morning I had experienced. Next stop, the big stuff.

It was an absolute relief to untangle the last remains of the monkey scrub that had been strangling me and snagging the shooting stick, and to step out onto clean tussock-ridden ground. I had been so caught up fighting the surrounding scrub that it almost gave me a fright stepping into a clear and expansive view of the magnificent catchment. My plan was to remain low in the creek and out of sight of any animals that may be perched up above me. The wind was doing just as the forecast had predicted, and the sun was well and truly beating down at this stage. I made myself comfortable and began the process of gazing my eyes across the big, undulating and hellishly steep catchment walls; there really was only one way in and one way out of this spot. A few chamois were spotted on the true right of the creek. **All were running solo and looked reasonably large in body with no offspring lurking, which certainly spiked the excitement levels.** After further assessment, I concluded that two of the culprits were large does of reasonable age and one was certainly a young buck which needed a few more years at least – he had nice hooks. I decided they were best left to their own devices and that I would keep an eye on them over the day, as they would likely become a bit more active as the afternoon progressed.

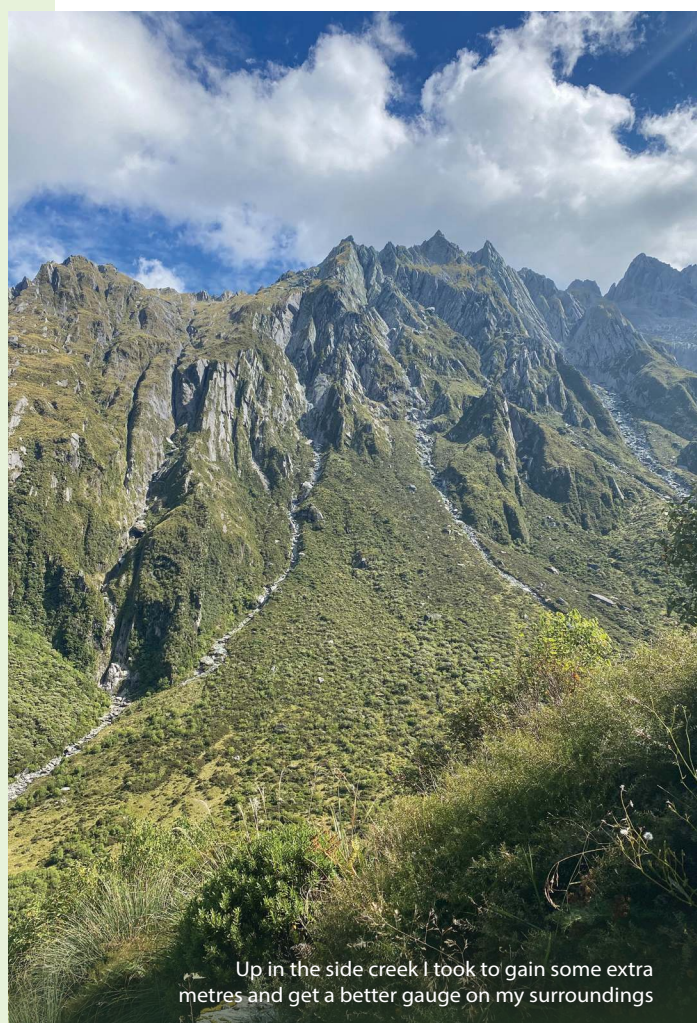
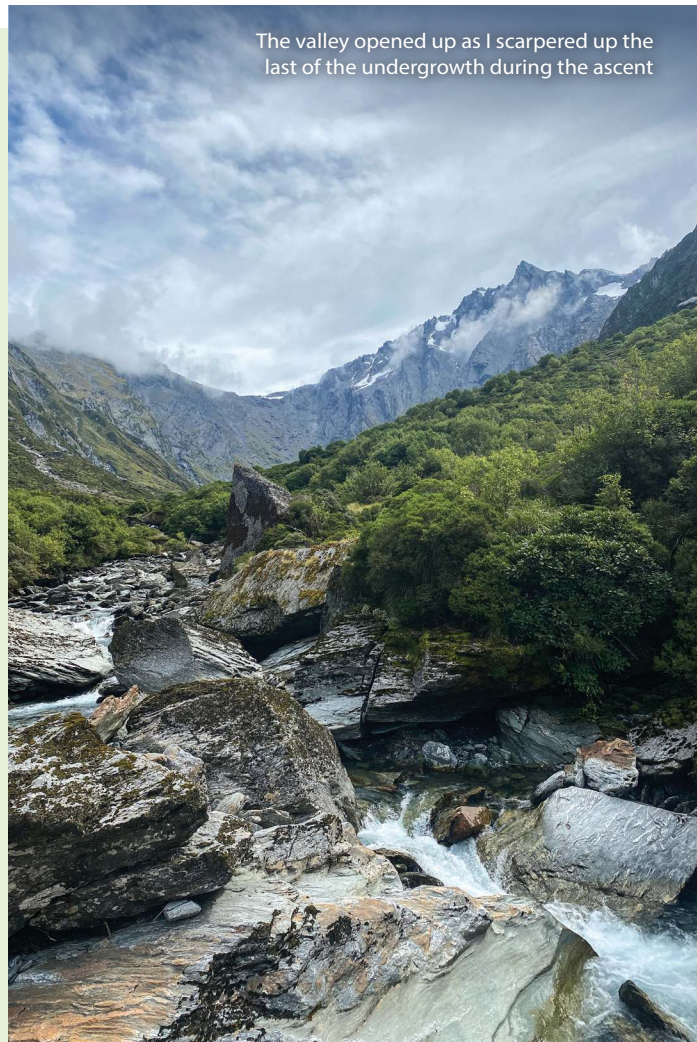
I packed up shop and made my way up a tight chute which would lead me to a perfect vantage point for evening/ morning glassing and, with some luck, a flat enough area to pit up for the night. Shortly after my arrival, the seven resident kea became aware of my presence and their constant screeching accompanied me for the rest of the trip, which was quite unpleasant. Over the next couple of hours, many more chamois had

crawled out of the woodwork, all of which were family groups consisting of multiple young and noticeably large bodied and well-conditioned does. This was making me slightly worried as mature bucks would usually keep their distance from these groups, and I may have hustled hours through the bush just to find myself in a chamois nursery. I spotted a lone bull tahr wandering across the expansive tops across the other side of the catchment. He looked decent, large-bodied and with plenty of horn mass, but well and truly out of my reach due to the fading light, and by the vertical wall between us. . . **it was time to retreat to the Domex for the night.**

I woke at 6am to another outrageously clear morning, not a cloud nor a kea to be seen. Crawling from my cosy abode beneath the fly to further assess the situation surrounding me, I realised that it was near light enough to begin the glassing process. As the sun began creeping up over the monstrous peaks around me, I began spotting chamois all over the show. Many were situated in areas well out of my reach – this was becoming a common theme. I was surprised that I had not spotted any deer feeding on first light on the bush edge further down valley after all the sign I had experienced on the way in. I had been glassing and watching numerous family groups through the spotter for a good couple of hours now and, once again, was beginning to get a bit worried that I had battled into a nursery catchment. **I packed all my gear and decided to continue along to the next best viewing point, which would uncover a small slither of the head basin which I hadn't yet laid eyes on.** I had made it all this way; it would seem silly to leave a small section untouched, as there could be anything in there, I told myself.

As I crept across the narrow scree chutes, I noticed some sizeable chamois prints. The sign looked old but gave me a flicker of excitement. Surely, it belonged to a buck. Higher up, on a couple of occasions I had seen a young buck following me. He was not worried in the slightest about my presence and continuously

The valley opened up as I scarpered up the last of the undergrowth during the ascent



Up in the side creek I took to gain some extra metres and get a better gauge on my surroundings



The glassing spot from my makeshift bivvy, West Coast weather putting it on!



A celebratory self-timer shot



Admiring the horns over a hot cup of Spanish Tomato soup in the creek

dropped altitude to check up on me. Wind was perfect and after 30 minutes of sneaking across the loose rockslides I could get a full view of the head basin, and remained perched behind a rock. **I picked up two more does with young in tow about 100 metres below me and merely brushed over them – not more does!** I continued glassing the area carefully when something caught my eye. A third chamois had appeared on the scene. I instantly did a double take. The animal was sitting down hidden well in the long tussock 250 metres across from me. It turned its head, silhouetting itself on the ridgeline. My heart started absolutely racing, I had found the donkey that had been evading me for the last 24 hours.

The first aspect of this animal that gripped me was his hooks; they seemed to never end, and I had never seen anything this dreamy before. I was uncertain of

his actual size but knew that he was definitely worth taking. With the 300WSM lined up, eyes on the prize, it was now a waiting game as he was looking very comfortable. Ten minutes of restless waiting went by (which felt like an hour), my heart was still flying at a rate of knots when he stood up from his posse. I double checked the earplugs were in as it's never a nice sensation receiving an earful from the muzzle brake. **He was now broadside, feeding up the ridge in slow but steady steps, but I waited for a steady pause. BOOMFA.** He reared up over backwards signaling a heavy hit directly in the engine room, landing on his back end and toppling down the further side of the ridge he had been planted on. I sat and waited for a few nerve-wracking minutes to ensure he hadn't got up or moved location. Excitedly I made my way across to the spot; in the background, I could hear numerous does calling, but I had no

idea where they were because I was too focused on the big fella. He was a big boy, with impressive body and horns. He had big fat bases in combination with reasonable length and deep sharp hooks. I didn't have my tape with me, as it's an item I always seem to lose whenever I have one in my possession.

After carrying out a few posing photos and dealing with the monster buck I decided I deserved a late lunch down in the main creek. Whilst boiling water for one of my favourite concoctions on the hill – Spanish tomato soup – I was able to dry off my fly from the previous night. It was here in the creek that I really started to realise that the specimen was pushing the top end of the spectrum and the waiting game before I could get a tape over him was killing me. I repacked my equipment and decided to make my way back toward the bushline for an evening stalk of the promising-looking country lower down. Nothing came of the following four hours until dark and I ended up camping inside the bush edge to take the edge off the next day's hustle back off the hill and down the riverbed. Walking back out to my vehicle on day three I felt like my plan had come to fruition and was very happy with my decision to check the last little bit of the catchment. The access to the catchment wasn't quite as I expected but at the end of the day it all worked out. This was another epic long weekend mission ticked off and I was hungry for more, looking forward to the fact that the hills were about to come alive with roaring Red stags.

When I got home I dug up a tape and he stretched out to just under 11 inches.



Fly camp featuring the buck, I slept like a baby on that occasion

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OTAGO MAIN DIVIDE STAG

It was the end of April, and although I had hunted 12 days of the month I had not seen anything worth pulling the trigger on

With a weekend of clear weather scheduled for the Wanaka area, the pack was thrown in the back of the truck and a plan was hatched to get into some areas of a catchment where I had spent a bit of time over the last couple of years. Unfortunately, work commitments got in the way, and it became evident I wasn't going to get into the intended location until after midnight on Friday, so an early start on Saturday morning was the compromise.

I arrived in the chosen catchment at daybreak and, to my surprise, there was only one other hunting wagon present. With no note of intentions, I had to make some decisions regarding where they might have headed, which is always a tricky one. **Having made up my mind, I headed for a scrubby north-facing slope, well off the valley floor.** I was hoping to catch out an animal that was living somewhere secluded from the general traffic generated by ballot holders a couple of

weeks prior.

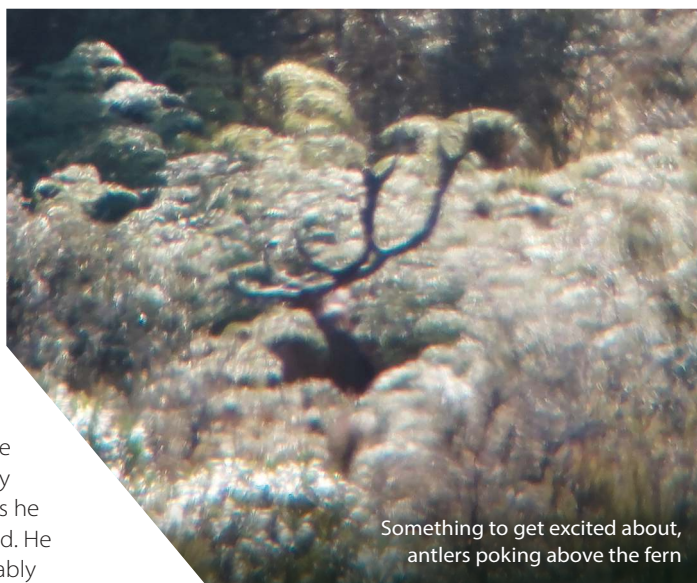
The 80L pack with one night's supplies was a very gentlemanly weight and it wasn't too long before I was up the hill and into some sign. I quickly set about making camp, ensuring I was sticking to the same general side of the intended hunting area to try and combat the anabatic and katabatic winds, which were quite pronounced on such a still day.

As the afternoon wore on, I moved between two observation points about 250 meters apart, alternating 30 minutes at each one until dark. This allowed me to glass the tussock basin above me for chamois and any deer living high, as well as below to the scrub belt which had a good variety of browse and beech forest cover. **The evening produced a hind and her fawn 500 metres below camp, casually making their way out of sight with no stag in tow.** This sighting, along with the lack of roaring half confirmed that the animals were quietly done with their annual ritual, and with darkness setting in I headed back to camp.

Morning arrived after a ten-hour sleep and a small interruption from the mountain sending some rockfall down during the night. At 7am there was enough light to see beyond 50 metres, so I rolled out of bed and, with a coffee in hand, I began glassing. Opting to first check out the bushline and scrub belt beneath me, I was rewarded with a set of antlers protruding from thick fern. The stag was situated roughly 100 metres from where the hind and fawn



The hind and her fawn



Something to get excited about, antlers poking above the fern

were spotted the night before. I got the spotter onto him and immediately saw that he had quite a bit of antler, but it was difficult to get much more of an idea of him due to the way his head was positioned in amongst the ferns.

I decided to get as close as possible to try to reassess him.

Due to the thick scrub between us the only platform available for a good rest and spotter set up was 385 metres away looking down on him. Now that the day had progressed and with the wind rising gently uphill, I set up for a shot and got behind the spotter. At this stage, I really needed the animal to turn his head and preferably stand

up to get a good look at his antlers and body. Letting out some quiet roars and steadily increasing the decibels he swung his head around. He looked to be a reasonably long twelve-point stag, being able to roughly fit two and a half skull lengths down the length of his antlers. He had a bez tine half snapped and quite thin beams, which gave the impression of them looking quite long. I decided to get behind the gun at this point and try to get him to stand for a good look at his body. After about an hour, with some

increasingly marginal roars from myself, he finally stood! I noted the filled-out chest and neck, low hanging belly and decided to have a crack at him.

He was standing broadside with his head turned toward me when I pulled the trigger. With a nice friendly blast from the 7mm Rem Mag muzzle brake, I saw him immediately

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The thick fern made finding him difficult



An impressive animal, just shy of 40" long

blood dried on crown fern about fifteen metres away. The uphill breeze carried the scent of him, so at this stage I set about scanning the area below. **To my surprise, he was folded up another ten metres away in thick scrub.**

On quick inspection he looked to be an impressive animal with 39 and 39.5 inch antlers, carrying twelve points, although one point was badly damaged. Surprisingly, he was in good condition, despite having just had a few weeks of scrapping and breeding. I set about getting some photos and removing the back wheels and backsteaks destined for Wanaka's Butchers

run hard. Unsure of the result, but feeling like I had a nice rest, I decided to head back to camp and pack up before tracking him down.

It took about an hour to pack camp and make my way to where he had been bedded. During my first inspection of his bedding, I couldn't

find any blood. That wasn't a fun moment! However, after crawling on all fours and examining a few possible game trails in the direction he had fled, I eventually noticed a piece of lung that was about the size of a 50-cent coin. I followed the general direction and only found a few minuscule splatters of

Block bier sticks and salamis. **It was a great trip to see out April, and it's always a rewarding feeling getting an animal of this calibre on a solo trip, where it's all on you to make the right decisions, which in this case led to a bit of success.**



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Our MISSION SOUTH

WRITTEN BY ~ BILLIE MACKINTOSH

The lunch spot on our last day

Finally, October 20th had arrived and we were all set for our big trip to the South Island. However, my dad quickly reminded me that we were not flying out until 4:30 pm and that I had to go to school first!

This gave him a chance to pack all our things, and double check we had everything. Then, at the end of the school day, my Mum and little brother dropped us at the airport, with a lot of “be careful” from Mum as we departed.

After a short stop in Wellington, we were on the next flight to Christchurch; when we got there and collected bags, gun, and bow, we quickly found out that the authorities in Wellington wanted our bullets more than we did, apart from the three in the magazine.

We found our rental car, stopped off for a bit of dinner then off to the motel for a doze. The next morning, we were up and early and off to Ashburton for some

backcountry, gas, and a pack of bullets that were the closest match to the ones Dad had lost. Afterwards, we visited Countdown, but Dad walked straight past the cheese section because he was preoccupied screaming at his phone as the All-Blacks took on Argentina in the semifinals.

We drove to Rangitata to meet up with a crack-up guy called Malcolm. There was another local crew waiting at the hanger, and Malcolm was apologising to them for not being able to understand our funny North Island accents.

Once loaded up, we were buckled in and gone; I was in the front and Dad was in the back. It was the most amazing ride of my life and the weather and snow-capped hills were stunning. We landed at our hut and had it all to ourselves, so excitedly we unloaded and watched the chopper disappear down the valley.



It was after lunch by this stage, and being a first for the both of us, we were eager to start beating the feet upstream and try to find our first tahr. It was so hot, and we chilled out by the river for a few hours. Then Dad spotted one, so we were off for a closer look. It took a few hours, but we



Spending an afternoon waiting by playing cards

The morning of day two was clagged in

reached within 200 metres and watched 'til late. At this stage, we could only see a few nannies and kids, so we headed back to the hut as dark descended upon us.

Dad dragged me out of my bed before daybreak on day two to do a mission up the face opposite to where we were the previous night. Upstream an hour later, we had reached our first river crossing and took our boots off and replaced them with Crocs. I followed Dad across, and we both squealed like little babies in the coldest water we had ever felt. We found ourselves halfway up to the top before the waterfalls got too steep and we could not go any further. There was the option of clambering through the scrub but that wasn't very inviting. We were struggling to see anything due to low visibility, so headed back down to the main river to get the Jetboil on to make a hot chocolate, then made our way back to the hut. **By afternoon we had managed to gather heaps of firewood and decided to go higher up to the snow opposite the hut; the big gully ahead was incredible.** We must have seen more than a dozen nannies and kids running down off the bluffs to feed about 400 metres away and a kea that almost was on my lap. Just before we were about to pack up, five young bulls popped out behind us and made their way across a snowy gully to feed. We were both buzzing seeing our first bull tahr but they were all too young, so we watched them for five minutes and returned to our warm hut.

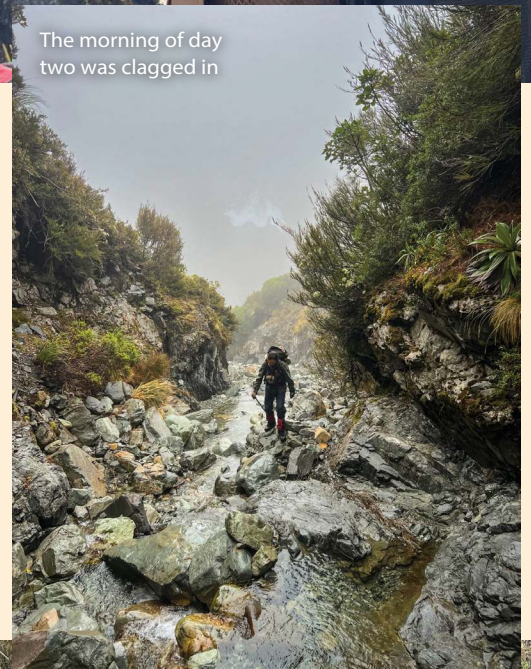
On day three it was nice to have a sleep in, while Dad was watching some tahr with the spotting scope. We had a relaxing morning and collected more

wood before setting off on another mission. We crossed the river once more, and grinded away for hours before popping into the head of the basin just below the bluffs, and the place was alive with animals. We sat there all afternoon, playing cards in the sun and a couple of good bulls turned up on the skyline but were feeding the other way. We sat and watched till 6pm before making our way back down, when Dad suddenly froze. He had spotted four big bulls crossing the creek below us.

Once out of sight, just around a little bend in the river we ran down as quick as we could, and by this stage the wind had swung and was on our backs. We

went out wide on the bend and spotted three of them on a ledge. I quickly ranged them at 240 metres and Dad lay on a big rock and took aim. He squeezed it off and drilled it straight through the heart, it lifted a leg and ran ten metres back towards us.

As it crumbled off the ledge, we were going NUTS. Once we got to it, we were blown away and knew it was one for the wall, so with only an hour till dark we got a couple of photos, and caped it out. We got to the hut in the dark and



Dad's bull tahr - perfectly 13"

Dad's bull caped out
back at the hut



put the tape on it and I clicked in at a perfect 13 inches.

Day Four – We woke to rain on the fourth day which we didn't mind because we had a "chilled day" around camp, played lots of cards and every time I lost Dad made me run to the fridge (aka little rockpool in the river full of his Steiny cans.)

Last Day – The final day dawned a ripper! **So, we planned to do a big long hike way up the river to the base of the main divide.** I couldn't wait because today was my opportunity to be on the gun. After four hours we reached an amazing spot to have lunch and basked in the sunshine. Dad spotted a thumper way above us, bedded down, watching our every move. We tried to get close but as we were in full view he was up and gone really fast. We were heading back to a good spot to chill, when suddenly we spotted three bulls straight above at the head

of a little gut. We snuck out of sight and planned a stalk up the gut downwind of them, dropping our packs to punch up a steep face to pop up on a great glassing spot, where we could see one only 100 metres away. But the wind must have been swirling because he looked cagey, took off and was joined by the

other two. They looked a bit unsure and pulled up at 200 metres. Dad was telling me to go for it, drop down to the second pin on the scope and shoot!

I put one straight into his engine room and Dad said it was a good shot. He took off holding his front leg up, going downhill, but in sight the whole time. As he made it about 50 metres, he took a tumble and off. He went down a steep scree shoot, Dad and I couldn't believe it. **WE BOTH HAD OUR FIRST BULL TAHR.** We got to him and dragged him up onto a bushy patch for some photos, then butchered him up and made the big journey back to the hut to put the tape on him and he was 11½ inches. We still had a bit of daylight and I convinced Dad we should jump in the swimming hole just up from the hut. **With a quick countdown we were in, and both of us running on water to get out of there – the best way to top off our amazing day.**

By 1am the rain had set in and by daylight the river was flooded and the chopper was due at 8am. We packed up all our gear, loaded the place up with firewood, and gave everything a good tidy up. Right on cue in came our taxi. Another awesome trip out in the chopper and back to the big smoke. Once we got to Christchurch, we both wanted to go back to the hut but holidays don't last forever! Back to Gizzy, back to reality! Dad's is now counting down until my brother turns 12 so he can do it all over again with him.

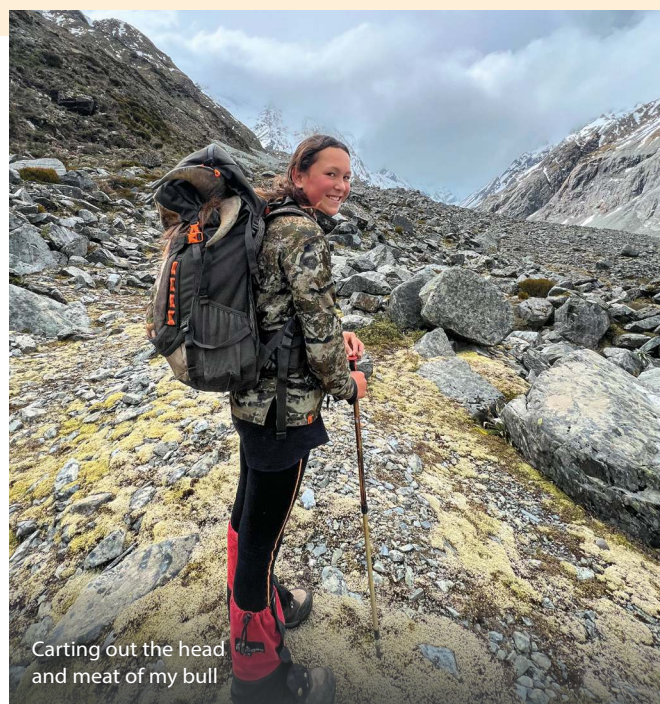
Big shout out to my Dad, it was the best trip ever - Billie Mae Mackintosh (12).



My tahr - 11 1/2 inches



The swimming
hole we ended up in!



Carting out the head
and meat of my bull



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WRITTEN BY - CODY WELLER | ADVANCED ARCHERY MARLBOROUGH

MOVEMENT AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME

When stalking in close on an animal, one of the main things we must do to stay undetected is stay still, isn't it?

Ungulates have it all over us in the eye department in their ability to detect movement. But what do we have to do in order to make a shot on an animal with a bow? Movement. So, we have to do the very thing we shouldn't do in order to be successful. Hmmmmmm....

A few weeks back, I had located a big old Red stag. He carried six points all up and was never destined for much more than the freezer. I watched his progress and planned a stalk; it wasn't long, and the distance between us was 45 yards, but no clean shot came about. So, I shadowed him for a little while until I could close in even more. He was 28 yards downhill, broadside on, good to go. I was focusing on the kill zone, not paying enough attention to the head end. I thought, "right, his head is down – it's time to come back to full draw." But I should have checked whether his eye was obscured. Not halfway through the draw cycle, and I'm busted. **I didn't panic though; I just stuck to the routine. However, just seconds before the shot popped, he was gone.** "Should have checked his eye, boy", I said to myself.

What I'm trying to explain with this example, is that the stalk is just the start. It's the instant when you choose to pull

the bow back that can be the make or break of the whole opportunity. Let's look at some of those moments so you can grab them and remain undetected during close-quarters situations.

It's a matter of keeping the head end obscured to some degree. **'Head up' situations like the roar can be tricky; the stag is walking in looking for another animal.** Try timing his head going behind a tree or behind a rise in the ground, or predicting his line and getting that bow back as fast, but as smooth as possible. Stags can expect movement to some degree, so you might get away with some minor movement, 'might' being the key word.

Waiting for animals to be feeding does seem straightforward, but those eyeballs are always looking. Use rocks, trees, tussock, or even other animals in the mob - whatever it takes to keep that head hidden. Don't be fooled as they can be

very good at tricking you. For example, your critter might suspect something is sneaking up on it, as they've heard, seen or smelt something slightly amiss. This is when you're about to get your arrow away. Your animal dips its head to feed, and at that moment, you think you're off the hook so you go to move. At that exact moment, they immediately pop their back up again. **The ol' fake head drop is done by all ungulates.** If they're aware something is amiss, wait for this to happen and let them get back to settled feeding, or they will bust you.

A favourite situation of mine is a three-quartering away, head down feeding shot. The head moves to the offside, so the eyes are blocked by their own body. In that moment, the bow comes to full draw, the pin floats mid-body a few ribs back and you are on. Just be aware of the step forward they can take - when you are in the moment, it can be hard to see.

Bedded animals can be very tricky. A lot of the time, you need to align your body with a reference point before taking a shot, then slowly inching your way into view of the body while maintaining head coverage. **There isn't much to distract them in bedded situations, so movement has to be made at the exact moment.** You need to situate yourself away from the head end as best as possible, given the cover available.

A classic roar scenario, stag coming in unawares but still alert looking for another stag



Just because an animal is feeding doesn't mean it can't see you, this stag has clear vision



Bedded animal shots can be very tricky, there isn't much to distract them so movement has to be made at the exact right moment



A good example of remaining well concealed during the full draw process

Occasionally, I have had success with being slightly caught out by the other animals within the mob. In the early stages of the 'hey, what's that?', the animal I have been targeting has been completely distracted by his mate looking at me. A couple of times now, I have found myself caught like piggy in the middle. While piggy was looking at his mate's body language, thinking something amiss is happening, I have been on full draw about to kill him. **I suppose this is not a situation that can be intentionally created, but it is an opportunity to take advantage of if it does happen.** And I would reiterate that it needs to be in the very early stages of the 'what the heck is going on here?' look. Much longer, and they all start looking in the same direction, and then it's very tricky to get the shot away.

Sometimes, you can pull the bow back far too early. This is often the case when you

are waiting on a walking animal. It can result in being stuck at full draw for far too long which, for most, is not easy on your shoulders. As an example, I roll the cams over at 67lb then at full draw I'm sitting on approximately 12lb. Much more than 20 or 30 seconds and everything gets pretty hard. The task of a good shot execution fades away to just wanting to get the shot off quickly. The chain effect kicks in: poor shot choice, poor execution, wounded animal. You can get wrapped up in just wanting the shot away because you are already at full draw and keen to get rid of the arrow.

Over-bowed is another very common issue. Many get fixated on wanting to shoot maximum poundage, right at the peak of (if not over) your physical capabilities. They want maximum arrow velocity. Maybe rethink that - a lot of hunting situations require out-of-the-

ordinary situations to get that bow back at full draw. Fast, jerky movements, - "sky-drawing" and just general flapping around are not recommended. All this extra motion will have a far greater chance of catching the attention of animals. Plus, the higher you go in poundage, the more your holding weight increases. If you do get stuck in that long hold situation, the wheels fall off a lot quicker. **These days bows are very efficient, so a slight decrease in the poundage can make for a far nicer draw after a big day.** A nice upright bow with a smooth draw-back into the backwall, without bouncing off the backwall, and settling into the shot is perfect.

This can also play a huge part in success when an animal is watching you. A classic situation is you step around a tree and right there is a deer standing there looking straight at you. This is when a slow, smooth draw will help to increase

A favourite situation of mine is a quartering away, head down feeding shot exactly like this



Chunky boar taken while bedded, quartering away. Resulted in a quick kill



Being prepared for the animal to step into the perfect gap is critical

the odds of you actually getting through to making the shot. An educated animal will most likely run, but sometimes, you just never know your luck. I think the process of coming to full draw naturally triggers the flight mode of most animals, much like a predator crouching and loading its body to pounce. They see us loading up and don't want a bar of what's going to happen next. Hence keeping that draw as smooth as possible.

Then, there is drawing back too late to get that arrow away, when the animal's head has come back up and spotted you mid-movement. It's a very fine line and as with a lot of things, reading the situation and recognising the right moment can take time. As long as you learn and start to recognise the moments you missed,

you will start to see them coming next time and be ready. This is often just time spent with animals within bow range and figuring out the right time to move. And don't worry - sometimes no matter what you know, you still won't get it right.

Later on the day, I busted the cull six-pointer; on my way back to the truck, I found another cull stag. Wonky old antlers like a two minute noodle. If I could close the gap, he would be in trouble. **Cutting down the hill, I kept the wind in my face and the crest of the ridge just above my eyeline.** The stag was happily feeding in a wide, dry gut. I could just use

the ridge as cover right into bow range and pop over at the last minute for the shot. A short time later, I was popping my head over the ridge. The stag was still

going about his evening, feeding up on grass. He moved into that beloved slight quartering away position. Smoothly, I came back to full draw with his head facing away and some grass obscuring his eyes. We were in business.

Settling in on the shot with the stag completely unaware, we were in.

I think the arrow had nearly burst out the off-side shoulder before he knew what had happened. And 30 yards later, he was done. No pressure of being watched by the animal, with that voice inside your head saying 'it's gonna go, it's gonna go'. No opportunity for the animal to react to the shot because he was aware something was about to happen. It's not always like that, but getting that bow back at just the right time can definitely make or break a great hunt. We tread a very fine line in close and sometimes it's that 1% here or there that can make a huge difference.

Be sneaky with your chosen moment to draw. I get told regularly by hunters that they "could have shot an animal the other day with a bow". **And maybe that's true, but sometimes just being close is only half the battle.**



Ungulates have very good rearward vision, this bull tahr can still see you



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Carol had carefully closed the gap from 150 to 25 yards of this mature sika stag while he was bedded. Patiently waiting an hour and a half, the stag eventually stood up to check a distant roar and in an instant was standing just seven yards from Carol. After a three-minute stare down the stag moved off and out of sight. Unfortunately the stag never gave Carol an opportunity to draw her bow before it moved away. While a shot hadn't been fired it had truly been a memorable experience.

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Photo by Mitchell Ewart

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REWILD FISH & GAME

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Hunting remains a popular activity for New Zealanders with approximately 45,000 people purchasing game bird hunting licences last year

However, the pursuit of game birds, like other forms of hunting, is facing increased scrutiny and challenges in the face of changing views on the management of some species, mounting attention to the sentience of animals, and ongoing debate around firearms control.

Now, Fish & Game New Zealand has launched a high-profile campaign to get more Kiwis hooked into hunting by showcasing its culture and heritage, the contribution hunters make towards protecting the environment, the benefits to hunters' mental health and wellbeing, and highlighting how lucky Kiwis are to be able to harvest sustainable wild food.

Fish & Game's ReWild campaign, launched in Christchurch in November, aims to inspire more New Zealanders to hunt and fish, not only for the adventure it offers, but also to help highlight the deep passion hunters and anglers have for the preservation of the country's precious wilderness habitats.

The campaign, which features stories, social media content, billboards and advertising across the country, focuses on

the many benefits of fishing and hunting, including environmental stewardship and conservation, food-gathering and improving mental health and wellbeing.

Equally important, it is about normalising the pursuits among those Kiwis not engaged, and showcasing the good work anglers and hunters do beyond harvesting their chosen quarry.

"We created the ReWild campaign to share our passion with all New Zealanders and encourage them to get out in nature and enjoy the benefits nature and wild spaces provide," says Corina Jordan, chief executive of Fish & Game New Zealand.

"We want Kiwis to 'rewild' themselves by connecting with the natural world and all the benefits it offers. We know New Zealanders love our natural environment and care about protecting it. We

want that knowledge to be based on experience, on getting out into the wild and putting the routine of daily life aside for a time.

"Hunting is great for physical and mental well-being – you don't focus on problems when you are deep in the hills or waiting in the maimai for the first flight of ducks to arrive. Hunting is also a fantastic way to connect with friends, to teach children skills, instill a desire to protect the environment and help them learn independence.

"Hunting is a way of being part of nature and its cycle. So, part of our focus is ensuring our wild places stay wild. And more than that, we must ensure that the life that survives there thrives there.

"Over the past few weeks, I've been lucky enough to head out with mates for a deer, in the Manawātū, and then a dive for pua and crays in the Wairarapa. We are so lucky to live in such a beautiful country with these opportunities on our doorstep. While there were many highlights to the trips, the adventure, the excitement of the hunt, and wild food for the plate, the highlight for me was the country and the people I was lucky enough to hang out with."

While angling has been the key focus for the campaign to date, hunters will soon see more ReWild hunting content in the

coming months, especially with the upcoming game bird hunting season, says Jordan.

"Hunting will be a central focus of the ReWild campaign this year. Hunters play a crucial role in protecting and developing wildlife habitats and advocating for the environment and it's important New Zealanders understand this.

"Our licence holders tell us that game bird hunting is an important part of New Zealand's outdoor heritage, it's a great way to spend time with family and friends and it's good for improving mental and physical health.

"Hunting also instills positive traits like responsibility, confidence, cooperation, discipline, and patience, contributing to the building of community and family relationships.

"If we can help the wider New Zealand population understand these intrinsic benefits, then our social licence to continue hunting and angling becomes that much stronger."

For Fish & Game, the ReWild initiative seeks not only to introduce more people to hunting but also to instill a sense of responsibility and passion for the preservation of the wild, ensuring that the next generation becomes the future conservationists of New

Zealand's land, Jordan says.

Dame Lynda Topp, a keen angler and hunter since childhood, is supporting the campaign and also encouraging Kiwis to rewild themselves.

"All Kiwis should have a chance to get out and connect with nature and have the chance to come together with family and friends to shake off their worries, have some fun, go hunting and connect with what it means to be a New Zealander," says Topp.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Share the ReWild social media content with your family and friends by visiting the campaign's Facebook or Instagram pages
- Share the campaign video
- Hear why Dame Lynda Topp supports the campaign at our Facebook page.



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TIME TO BEAT THE FEET

WRITTEN BY
MICHAEL MCCORMACK | @CHASEANDGATHER

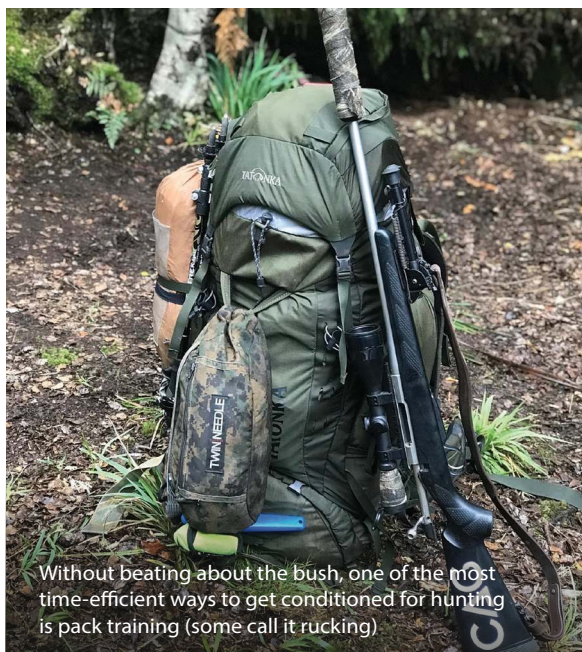
IF THERE IS ONE PHRASE THAT SEEMS TO KICK MOST HUNTERS INTO GEAR, IT WOULD HAVE TO BE "THE ROAR IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER, EH!". ALTHOUGH THIS COMMENT IS OFTEN PREMATURE, IT TRIGGERS FRANTIC BEHAVIOUR AND A STATE OF READINESS FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS.

The news that the roar is just around the corner may bring the sudden realisation that the last semblance of any type of fitness work done was three months ago when filling in for a mates' social netball team and ending with pulling a hamstring. It can be a bit of a mad scramble to get ready to hit the hills, and to ensure that you aren't the one left behind at the car park by mates who are already off and over the next ridge roaring in the first stag of the trip!

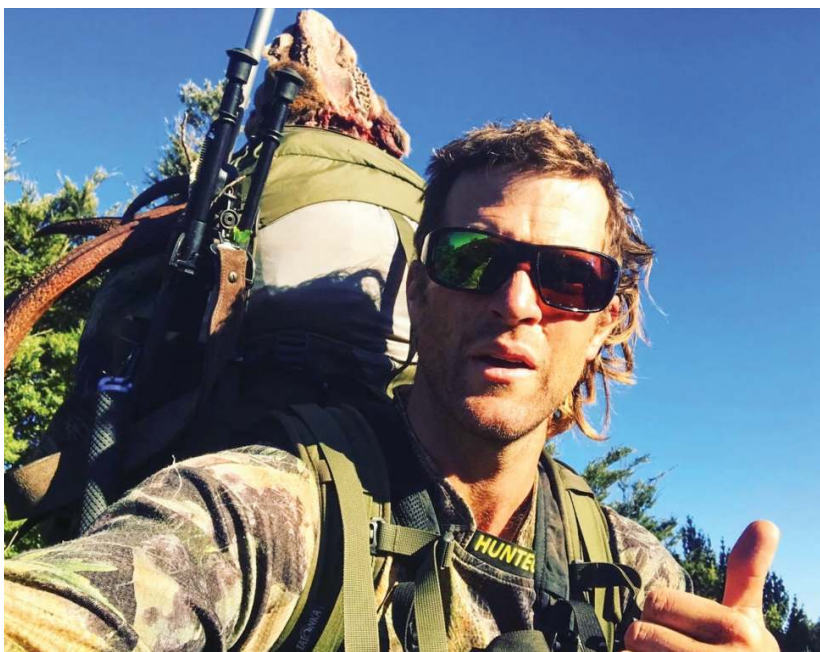
IS THE CLOCK REALLY TICKING?

Depending on which roar or rut you are targeting this year, you may have more (or less) time than you think. For the most part, the roar usually kicks into gear in autumn, late March continuing throughout April. Following on from that peak season of action you then have the other species who rut in early or midwinter, such as Rusa, Sambar deer or tahr and chamois.





Without beating about the bush, one of the most time-efficient ways to get conditioned for hunting is pack training (some call it rucking).



If you are only chasing the later action, then you have a bit more time up your sleeve to get fit!

Regardless of when you plan to go, the start of the year signals a time to step up your fitness training if you want to go stronger for longer on the hills. You want to have the capacity to hit the hills with confidence, knowing that you have the capability to tackle some big days (and hopefully heavy loads).

WHERE TO START

If you are regularly out hunting or in the hills, then you have a massive head start. In fact, as many of us know, the best way to get physically conditioned for hunting is to go hunting! Daily commitments often don't allow for a weekly sortie in the hills so planning to get fit in the time you have, with what you have, is key.

Without beating about the bush, one of the most time-efficient ways to get conditioned for hunting is pack training (some call it rucking). The good news is that everybody has a pack and walking is free (last time I checked), plus you can do it anywhere. If you had just one form of training exercise to choose from to get fit for the hills – pack walking is the one!

PREP WORK

Getting set up for pack walking is pretty straightforward:

» Dust off your hunting boots and start by wearing them around the yard, home or even at work for a couple of days before you launch into your training, so you don't derail your fitness prep by getting blisters on your first walk! Feet fitness is often overlooked, and they take a real pounding considering the amount of steps and load we put them through. Look after your feet!

» You can start with your day pack and then as the weeks go by, step up to your walk-in hunting pack (often 60/70L+).

» Set up your pack correctly, so that your waist/hip region is taking most of the load. The shoulders will take the remainder of the load. Take your time to get this right. There are some video tips online to guide you.

GETTING LOADED

» Find some suitable "weights" to load in the pack – bags of

uncooked rice are a good starter as they mould well to your back. I often use water bottles as they are really durable.

» In the first few weeks start gradually with a pack load of 10% of your bodyweight. So, for a 90kg person, you would start with 9kg of weight in your pack. If you are very new to pack walking, then start off with 5% of your body weight and work up from there.

» Because you are walking with a load on your hips/back your gait (walking style) and your locomotion, stride length, and leaning forward aspects all change compared to walking without load. This is working our muscles in a new and different way so we need to allow them time to adjust before we crank things up too much!

» Add ten minutes to each walk and increase the carrying load by 5% every second week. So, a suggested schedule could look like:

Weeks 1 & 2: walking for 30 minutes per session with 10% bodyweight load

Weeks 3 & 4: walking for 40 minutes per session with 15% bodyweight load

Weeks 5 & 6: walking for 50 minutes per session with 20% bodyweight load

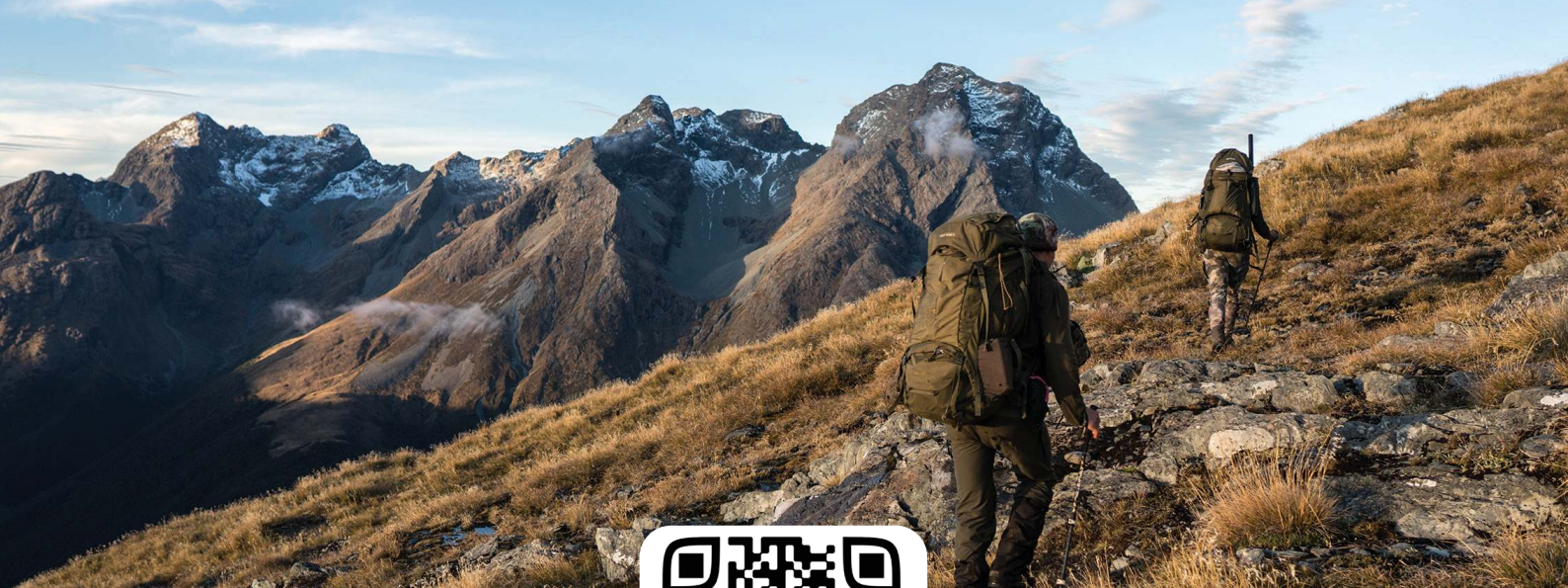
Weeks 7 & 8: walking for 60 minutes per session with 25% bodyweight load

As you progress, you should gradually increase the weight you carry and the duration of your walks. If you feel that the weight is too heavy, make sure to take regular breaks as needed. You may also choose a path with less elevation gain or reduce the load to make it easier for you to continue. Make sure that there is always a day in between each session where you do something different – a jog, swim, bike ride, gym circuit session – something that is fresh and different.

HIT THE TRAIL

» Do some research to find off-road local trails in your area. Often, you will find hidden reserves or parks that you didn't know were there, and look for tracks with some undulation, stairs or hills. Sometimes, this may involve a short drive to get to a road end, car park or similar.

» Getting out and onto offroad tracks and trails will help you build your balance, strength and agility, more so than just walking on flat tarmac. If there is a farm nearby, ask if you can trek across



a the paddocks or sheep tracks on your loop near home.

» If you are really desperate and have no other choices, you can even do your pack walking on the treadmill.

» These training walks provide a great opportunity to become familiar with any navigation tools, apps or devices you use. Test out functions such as tracking, marking waypoints and working out options such how long it takes you to cover a certain distance.

PICK AND MIX

Pack training is an extremely effective way to get 'match fit' for the hills but doing too much at once is a surefire way to end up doing yourself a mischief. Mix up how you train during your week to include different movement patterns steady state or high intensity cardio, upper body strength work and developing your core muscles, and do include some mobility and flexibility sessions.

» My recommendation is to mix in some cross training or circuit training – this form of training involves doing different exercises within the same session (going around a circuit of stations) to work on different areas of the body It may include leg exercises, upper body, core work, and bouts of cardio. This makes for a really effective way to build anaerobic fitness (when you need to unlock a sudden burst of energy), abdominal and core strength plus strengthening exercises for the hamstrings, quads and butt.

» Make sure you include a day for recovery and mobility-based exercises. Flexibility isn't a focus in training programmes but being able to manoeuvre through scrub and under/over logs can save a lot of time and cursing.

» Try and mix up the loads you are carrying, so some days the weight is lighter (10% of body weight) or some days the load is heavy (40% body weight), and the walk is shorter.

» If you have a hill or mountain nearby, mix up the tracks you walk so you challenge yourself more, or increase the intensity by doing short sharp bursts up the hill to bring the heart rate up higher.

FOOD AND DRINK

» Being (and staying) well hydrated is essential for high performance on the hill. Being even a little bit dehydrated results in a loss of capacity. Your decision-making abilities and mental clarity deteriorates. Keep a bottle of fresh water at the top of your pack.



» If you are trying to trim down a 'spare tire' around your middle, be very mindful of limiting high-sugar energy snacks and too many processed carbohydrates. Even losing 2kg in body fat can help a lot! 2kg in weight is equivalent to four blocks of butter.

» A protein-based powder mixed with water and ice cubes straight after a session is a good recovery option to get the fluids and amino acids on board and fast-track recovery. Be sure to check the nutrition information panel to choose protein powders with less than 5g of sugar per serve, if you are aiming to lose some body fat.

ACCOUNTABILITY

» Track down a mate who has health and well-being goals (or who you will be hunting with) and build in some gentle competition to speed up the progress. Fitness isn't just about physical health, but provides a great opportunity for us all to improve our social and mental health along the way.

» It's good to challenge yourself by setting a distance goal each week greater than the week before, and trying to beat it using a timer. Use your alarm clock – I would encourage you to get some early morning training sessions in, so your body becomes familiar with moving under load in the early mornings. We are often up early when we are on the hills to commute to a preferred hunting spot for first light.

FREE HUNTER CONDITIONING PROGRAMME (YouTube video series)

I have created and filmed an 8-week hunter conditioning training programme, free to access on the [Chase and Gather YouTube platform](#).

This programme caters for beginner/intermediate/advanced fitness levels. Scan the QR code above and give it a crack! It will provide some good options to keep things progressing.

GO WELL OUT THERE!

Just remember, the clock may be ticking but build your intensity and load up gradually, mix the training type up, get into good eating habits, focus on hydration levels and tackle things day by day.

Enjoy the process, get others involved, and blend it into your lifestyle so you can then maintain your momentum throughout the whole year. Then it's not a mad rush for 2025 roar, which apparently "is just around the corner". Be safe out there, ID x 3!!





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Fly Camping on the Tops

WRITTEN BY
MITCH THORN
@SOUTHISLANDRIFLEWALKERS

Public land backpack hunting ticks all the boxes for me. It offers a sense of adventure like nothing else; setting off into the unknown to explore a patch of wilderness with no idea of what you might find

You could stumble across that trophy of a lifetime or nothing at all. The only guarantee is that when you get home those squiggly lines on the topo map will now hold a memory of time well spent. Within that, being able to live out of your backpack provides a sense of freedom that's hard to replicate. You can camp where you want, eat when you want and go as far (or near) as your mind and body will let you - or to the extent the

wilderness allows. Everything you need to thrive and survive is within arm's reach nestled on your back.

Once you've got the essentials packed, the decisions you make with the gear you carry have a massive influence on your experience. There's a certain level of sacrifice navigating between comfort and discomfort at various stages of the hunt.

The more luxuries you carry, the more comfortable you'll be around camp, but the more you'll suffer on the hike. The same can be said the other way around- with a lighter pack the hiking is easier, but you might be less

comfortable when you stop moving. This balance varies from person to person and trip to trip. Through my experiences so far, I've found I enjoy the comforts of good food, plenty of warm clothes and a proper night's sleep. When you add our filming equipment to the mix, our packs are usually on the heavier end of the spectrum. **The focus of this hunt was to change that: we were going lightweight.**

We had five days up our sleeves aiming to traverse the length of a mountain range in search of a pre-roar Red stag for the wall. Light, fast and far was the plan. It was new country for both Raddy and I, so we weren't sure what to expect. We had read of good chamois hunting in the area but had no information about deer numbers. I had doubts immediately after we hit the tops when we bumped into a group of five goats from the scrub in front of us. On previous hunts, I'd never seen a deer in the same country as goats, a theory I hoped we could prove wrong. Shortly after, we caught the tail end of a chamois buck disappearing over the ridgeline above. We had just enough time to get the camera on him and realise we'd just spooked a respectable animal. Ahh well, early days.

It was daunting when we reached the top of the main ridgeline and identified the peak our route had us summiting at the other end of the range. There was a lot of area to cover and some pretty steep sections to negotiate between us and our end goal. **As daunting as it was it filled me with optimism, surely there would be some pockets of deer scattered along the way in such a likely-looking country.** A scattered band of scrub separated the native bush from the open tussock tops above, just the type of habitat you expect to find stags occupying in the lead up to the roar; feeding up trying to put on as much condition as possible. After the first mob of goats and an unsuccessful evening glass, I continued to question my confidence in the area. We only managed to pick up a lone goat as the sun slipped behind the distant peaks.

Our first lightweight decision was to ditch the tent and bring a fly instead. This saved us around 1.5kg of weight and a ton of space in our packs. I'd never been fly camping before (well, not on purpose

anyway) but it always appealed to me - a minimalist approach that immerses you in your surroundings. We found a relatively flat patch of grass high on the tops to set up a shelter for our first night. The weather forecast was ideal for the week: light winds and no rain. This really opened up our options for where we could camp. My main concern in the leadup to the trip was my lack of a bivvy bag. We were camping at around 1500 metres altitude, so I was expecting to wake up covered in dew. In an effort to avoid this, we hopped inside our yellow pack liners as a makeshift bivvy bag. They're pretty short so it only covered as far as my stomach. **On top of that I had stuffed my air mattress in there to protect it from any sharp sticks.** She was a tight squeeze; I was effectively pinned on my back unable to roll over. My lack of physical comfort was overshadowed by my mental comfort that I wouldn't wake up wet and cold.

I couldn't have been more wrong... At about 4am I woke up wet and cold. It

turns out my brilliant idea of a big yellow body condom condensed overnight, my sleeping bag was soaked from the waist down. **The top half that hadn't been tucked into the pack liner was relatively dry... just a thin surface layer of dew... lesson learnt.**

We were itching to see the sun that morning, as it had been a long and uncomfortable night. Another unsuccessful glassing session had us scratching our heads but the hot coffee and sun drying out our sleeping bags kept the spirits high. We had an exciting day ahead of us - our first full day along the tops. It was time to open up some country and test the feasibility of our route.

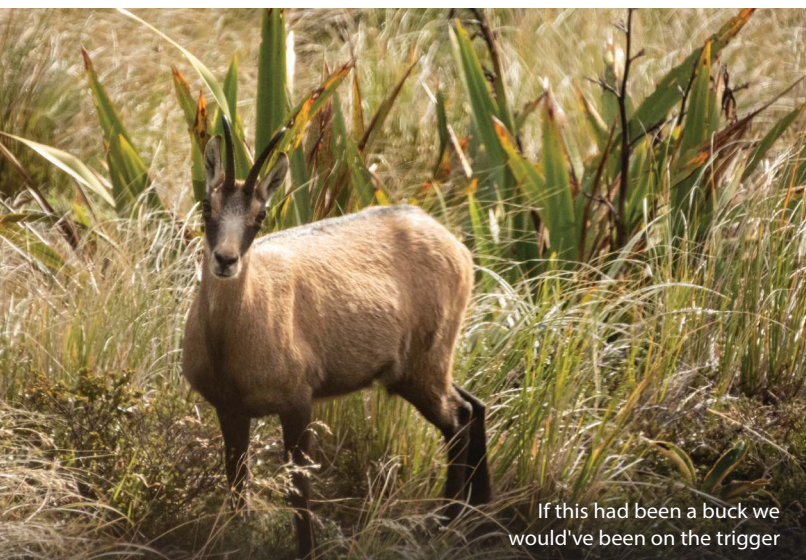
Our desire to see the sun quickly faded as the summer heat beamed down on us during the hike. After about four hours of travel we found a nice flat basin to set up the fly. We hadn't made it as far as we had hoped, but between the lack of sleep and afternoon heat we were absolutely spent. There was a promising looking head basin nearby, so we were more than happy to

It's hard to beat hiking along the top of a range





Happy to take our time packing up after a cold night's sleep



If this had been a buck we would've been on the trigger



Raddy glassing the first headbasin of three that morning



Our view from our third campsite

dump packs and catch up on a couple hours of shut-eye before setting off for a glass.

We spotted the first stag of the trip that night; a solid 8-pointer feeding his way out from the bush edge up into the tussock. He had a massive body on him but needed a few more years to reach his potential.

Watching him sparked our excitement for the rest of the trip, and was proof the area wasn't just filled with goats!

On top of that, the stag was in great condition and feeding exactly where we had been hoping. Our chances of finding a wall hanger were looking up.

The second night we trusted our Nikwax-treated Domex sleeping bags and slept on top of the pack liner. Waking up after a full night's sleep with dry sleeping bags made a world of difference to the energy levels. We were up at sparrows' fart to break camp and carry on exploring. Just over the ridge from us was the head of three large valleys that ended up against one another. Before we could reach them Raddy spotted a chamois feeding down the face from us. It was no further than 100 metres away, and from what we could see through the binos, it had some serious length to its horns. **The camera came out in record speed to get a proper assessment.**

Buck or doe? The question we ask ourselves when we look at just about every chamois. The horns had a lot of height and decent splay, but it was staring straight at us so we couldn't judge the hook. We had just about talked ourselves into getting the rifle ready when we saw a kid feed out from a fold in the hillside nearby. She was a doe, safe from us. Shortly after that, she squatted to pee, a giveaway of a female animal. As cool as the encounter was, the draw of unknown country nearby

had us carrying on and leaving them be. A kãrearea swooped us on our way over the top, another nice moment from the morning.

The first head basin came up empty, but the second one provided. A group of four stags were feeding their way up the hill, stopping to spar along their way. One in particular drew our attention immediately, bedded under a rock about 50 metres away from the other three. He was behaving like a wiser animal, was this going to be the shooter we were after? Not quite. Another 8-pointer a few years from his prime. His cover didn't last long either- one of the younger stags moved in looking for a sparring partner. **He wasn't all that interested, but you can't fault the young stag's persistence.**

The young one decided if he wasn't going to let him practice fighting he would make a great hind to practice on... this got the big fella moving and they ended up tussling their way out of sight. Amused by the spectacle we carried on to the last basin for a coffee and some breakfast. There were a few goats scattered around the basin, two of which were feeding within 30 metres of a hind and fawn that were bedded in the tussock 100 metres below us. There goes the deer and goat theory.

Two years of anticipation. For two years I had been dreaming of this spot. Fueled by boredom on a rainy tent day I stumbled across this particular mountain range when studying a topo map. **To be more specific, it was one head basin that caught my eye.** It looked like a large meadow isolated at the head of a hanging valley, miles from any tracks. If you could zoom in far enough on the topo maps I'm sure you'd spot an old donkey of a stag feeding its way across the clearing. I'd been manifesting the big fella for bloody ages! After years of dreaming about this spot it



The range lived up to our expectations, the country was incredible

was right there, just over the next ridge. We set up camp a few hundred metres back from the ridgeline and dumped most of our gear.

I could hardly contain my excitement as we peeked over the ridge. The valley lived up to my expectations; it was picturesque, although the meadow was more of a bog than a clearing. **A meandering stream weaved down the length of it with scattered tarns on either side.** The valley itself was incredible. Mature, native bush led up to a thick band of scrub with tussock faces above glowing golden in the evening sun. The whole area was isolated from the valley below, separated by a steep drop-off at the far end. It seemed like an untouched paradise, so surely there would be some deer living in here.

It took all of 20 seconds to spot a good stag feeding high up in the tussock at the other end of the face beneath us. His antlers had some serious length and his body looked massive. As with the rest of the stags in the area he was a nice symmetrical 8-pointer, but compared to them, he definitely looked to have a bit more age to him. He was still a long way

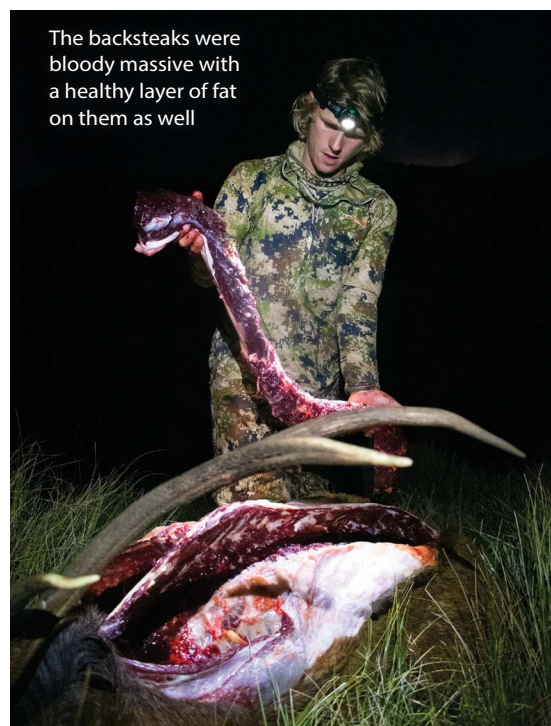
away, so we wanted to close the gap before deciding if he was a shooter or not. **We ducked back over the ridge and sidled around the hillside so we could pop out directly above him.**

It was a pretty straightforward stalk with favorable wind and plenty of cover.

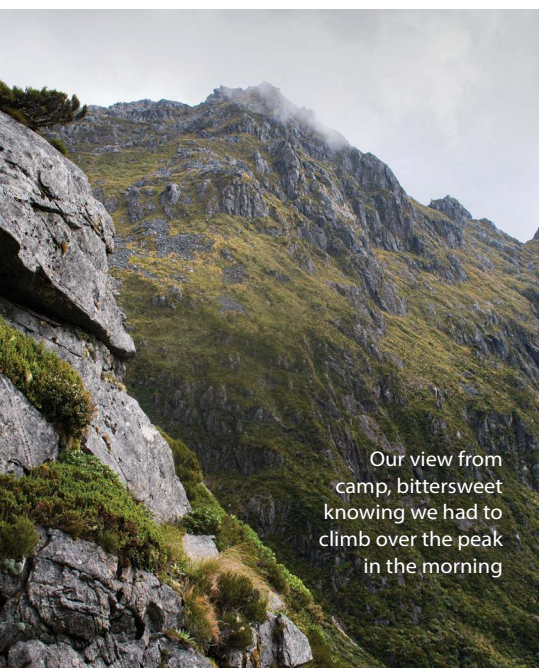
When we climbed back over the ridge the stag was feeding about 300 metres down the hill from us. Raddy made the call that he wanted to close the gap a bit more and have a crack. It was all on; we were pretty exposed in our last 50 metres of stalking but the stag was preoccupied, sparring with a younger animal. Raddy got comfortable behind the trigger whilst I set up the cameras. At 250 metres Raddy was feeling confident that the .308 would get the job done. The stag continued fighting for about ten minutes before bedding down. He was sitting broadside but Raddy was happy to wait for him to stand up and present a broadside shot. Another 15 minutes rolled by and our daylight was fading; my nerves were definitely starting to build. Thankfully, Raddy kept his composure behind the rifle. When the stag stood up we were all set and Raddy placed a shot



Raddy chuffed with the result of our efforts



The backsteaks were bloody massive with a healthy layer of fat on them as well



Our view from camp, bittersweet knowing we had to climb over the peak in the morning



The promised land



It was good to see a decent family group of chamois

through the base of the neck, dropping him on the spot!

I don't know who was more excited - Raddy for nailing a thumper of a stag or me for the location it was shot. **Either way we were bloody buzzing!** It's always an incredible feeling when a stalk goes to plan; right from the planning stage all the way through to the animal tipping up. We were running out of daylight as we approached him for photos and butchery. The size of the animal took us by surprise, it was an absolute horse. The body was a bloody barrel, I haven't seen a deer in such great condition before. To put it in perspective - its body was bigger than the Wapiti hybrid bull Chris shot in Fiordland. The backsteaks were half as tall as Raddy, each one had at least ten decent servings worth of meat in them. There goes the lightweight aspect of our trip...

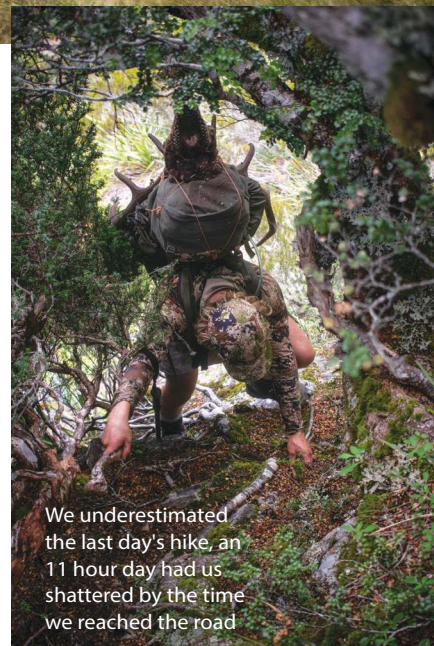
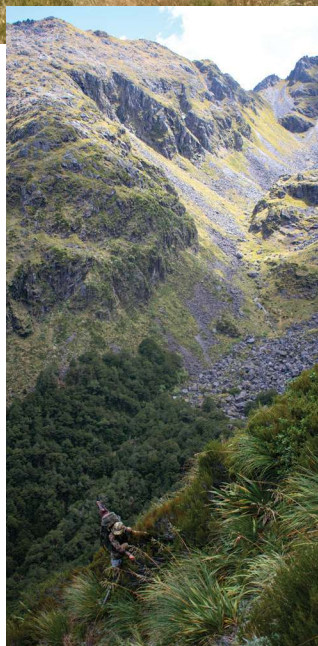
We arrived back at the camp near enough to midnight. That's when the faff of fly camping became apparent. We still had to blow up the air mattresses, have dinner and pack all of our gear away to avoid it getting damp overnight. It didn't matter though; we were probably too excited to go straight to sleep regardless.

We woke early, hoping to glass the rest of the promised land over the ridge but the area was clagged in - enough of an excuse for a sleep-in for us. It was about 11am by the time we broke camp and set off along the tops. We had two massive days of travel left. With heavier packs and a howling nor'west, the travel was made difficult. It was a challenging undulating ridgeline with a ton of steep elevation gain and loss. **Each time it bluffed out we had to backtrack, drop down the steep Spaniard-riddled tussock, sidle below the bluffs and climb back onto the ridge.** We ran out of water around 4pm and there was still the tallest peak of the route between us and the biv we

intended on sleeping in. We dropped down into a basin to fill up our camelbaks and ended up dumping packs and setting up the fly. A rather lazy evening hunt didn't provide any animals but we weren't fazed. What fazed us was Raddy working out a serious oversight in our trip planning. We had dropped a pair of running shoes off at this end of the range and left the truck at the other end where we started. It turns out the truck was 40km away... one of us was going to have to run a marathon after five days of tops hunting...

The final day of the trip was always going to be a gut buster, and with the added morning climb, we were in for a big shift. We got lucky when we reached the summit and found some reception. We called one of the farmers up the road and got the best news we could have asked for. He was happy to come pick us up at the trailhead, you bloody legend! We can't thank you enough Red, you saved us a night of fly camping by the highway waiting for a hitchhike. The hike out took us longer than expected, it ended up being about an 11-hour day on the feet.

I was pretty broken when we eventually reached the road, but I couldn't have been happier. Reflecting on the hunt I can't help but smile. The country was epic; we had five days of exploring a pretty wild and untamed area with bluebird weather. I finally got to lay eyes on my dream spot and Raddy got



We underestimated the last day's hike, an 11 hour day had us shattered by the time we reached the road

to knock over his best stag to date. The fly camping added another level of excitement to the trip and went smoothly after a shaky start. I think a bivvy bag is worth taking next time in case the weather isn't so favourable. The lightweight element completely changed the game as far as my body was concerned. I don't think I would have made it the length of the route in our given time period if I had carried up all the luxuries I usually take. Going forward I'll be more focused on what gear needs to come and what gear I want to come. Summer is definitely an easier time of year to do this as it can be slightly more forgiving. My pack weighed in at 18kg (without water). When compared with my usual kit for a five-day winter hunt I cut out 16kgs worth of gear... replacing the 90+ 10L Tatonka bison with the Norix Stealth 48L pack. There's definitely room for improvement as a few bits of kit weren't essential and there's a couple of lighter weight options for the gear we did use. **We plan on trying to refine our system next summer, so all we need now is to dream up another spot on the topo!**



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3D PRINTING FOR THE HUNTER

WRITTEN BY - LUKE CARE

This article is a little tangential for a hunting magazine, but something that would interest a few of our readers

After our huge Cook/Balfour trip and the spectacular bull I was fortunate enough to take home, I started thinking about how I could share that physical reminder with the rest of the crew.

I had heard tales of clients in the states and Alaska getting replica moulds made of the expensive trophy Stone or Bighorn rams and gifting them to guides. I looked in to this option and it was prohibitively expensive for a kiwi magazine editor!

I let the idea bubble away in the back of my mind for a while, considering a few options, but nothing gave the guys something to physically hold in their hands. In this time Roy Sloan asked for some brainstorming ideas prior to their

Winter Wapiti Weekend, and I thought how cool would it be to have copies made of the huge old trophies like the Nitz head so that people could actually handle them and truly feel the weight and size without risking those precious originals.

TROPHY REPLICAS

After a while Simon Clark popped up on my radar. He is a Sika hunter and a 3D scanning and virtual reality modeling guru, who's causally building a full-size replica T-Rex skeleton in his garage in Cambridge. It's quite impressive, especially when you consider each piece can only be printed at about the size of a toaster. After looking at it in person I can assure you there are a great many toasters in a T-Rex skull.



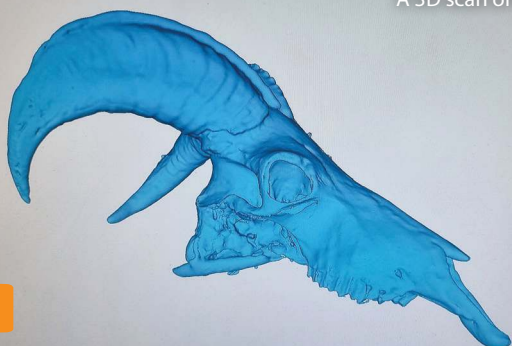
The replica next to the real deal

Simon offered us a beautiful Sika statue to give away, which will go to a lucky reader of this article. He has sculpted this image wearing a virtual reality headset, and then set his 3D printer to making it a reality.

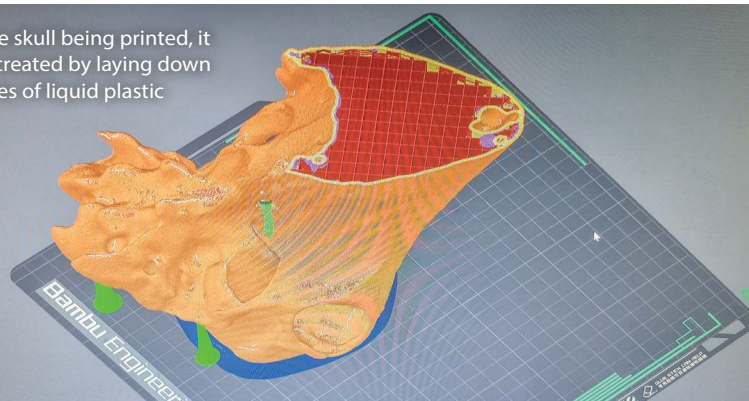
It took me a surprisingly long time to join the dots and ask if Simon could scan my tahr skull! He had already dabbled in the idea by printing a Sika skull to attach a pair of cast antlers to, so he knew what challenges to expect.

The process appeared fairly simple to a layman like me. Simon waved a magic wand around (the 3d modelling sensor) and imported the resulting image

A 3D scan of the bull tahr



The skull being printed, it is created by laying down lines of liquid plastic





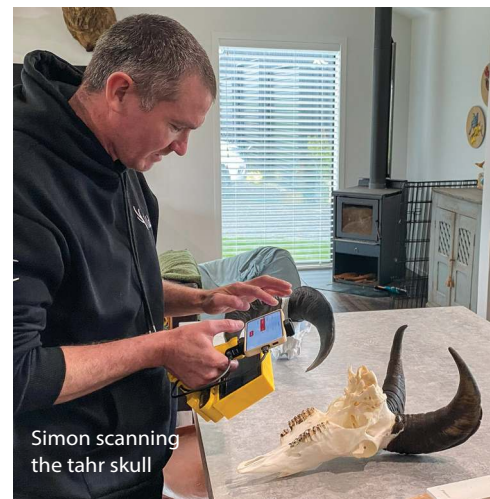
The horns as they came out of the printer



Painting the finished products. You can see the joins between the skull and the horns



The damaged chamois trophy next to the original skull



Simon scanning the tahr skull

into his VR workspace. He then used VR tools to 'manually' sculpt away the imperfections in the scan. Blowing the skull up to house-sized proportions and shaving away errant pixels while standing in the eye-socket, quite mind-boggling technology really!

We printed a draft version using a cheaper corn starch based resin. It's printed in two pieces, the skull, and then the horns, as the whole product is too large for his printer to do in one piece. The joins are then plastic-welded together. Once we were happy with the draft Simon hit go on two copies using a more stable plastic. This is slightly more expensive but is more durable and UV stable.

The detail it preserved was incredible. It's very close to lifelike, and you can count all of the annuli right down to the bases though they do start to get a little muddled past year ten. The tips were a little off, losing a little on the long side and adding a bit to the short side, but Simon has learnt from practicing on this bull and reckons he can get better fidelity now. Fortunately Simon painted the skull for me too because that is not where my skill set lies.

I was rapt at the chance to give something back to the team after such an epic trip, and there is now a copy at the NZ Hunter Barn in Canterbury and Nigel's place on the coast. Mark Walker and I are even considering mounting my bull using the copy, so that the original skull is kept whole and on display too.

OTHER USES

Following on from this Simon had a request from a hunter who had shot a nice chamois, but it had broken it's horn off after the shot.

Search as they might they couldn't find it, so he had resigned himself to a one-horned trophy until he saw my replica at the Sika Show. Simon scanned the existing half of his chamois, duplicated and flipped it, and printed a copy with two horns!

Another wee project my local taxidermist has going is dabbling in bronze work on miniatures at about 1/4 scale. To get the proportions right at such fine detail we've printed miniature horns for Mark to reference while he sculpts the form.

Simon has also started playing with a Wapiti replica too so fingers crossed we can get that in motion and preserve some

of our heritage trophies with these copies. The current prototype has metal threads for removing the antlers as simply shifting those monstrous Wapiti heads presents quite a challenge!

The opportunities with this are endless and affordable, my replica cost a tiny fraction of what a true mould would have cost. If you'd like to get in touch with Simon about any ideas try him at

www.topgunsni.com



If you'd like to go in to the draw to win Simon's Sika stag sculpture, simply join the Sika Foundation and forward your membership receipt to luke@nzhunter.co.nz. This will be open for the duration of this magazine, from February 8th to April 11th.

WIN



A 3D printed Sika stag, entirely sculpted in virtual reality and hand painted to finish

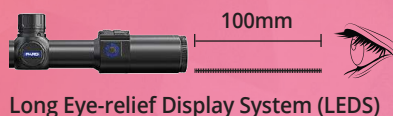
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BERETTA

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Gallery

WINNER



1

Zoe (8) and Em Thiele (10) with a couple of fat spring Fallow yearlings taken by mum with her Tikka T3 308. The girls are eager helpers and got involved with the field dressing



2

James Christensen with a mean stag and a mean mullet, shot with a Tikka T3X in 6.5 Creedmoor

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3

Luke Sellwood shot a great old stag using a Sako mounted with a Burris Eliminator

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Paul Nickson with a stag
taken using a Sako 75 308

4



5

Tony Mason from Marlborough with a stag
shot with his new Strata Tikka T3 .308



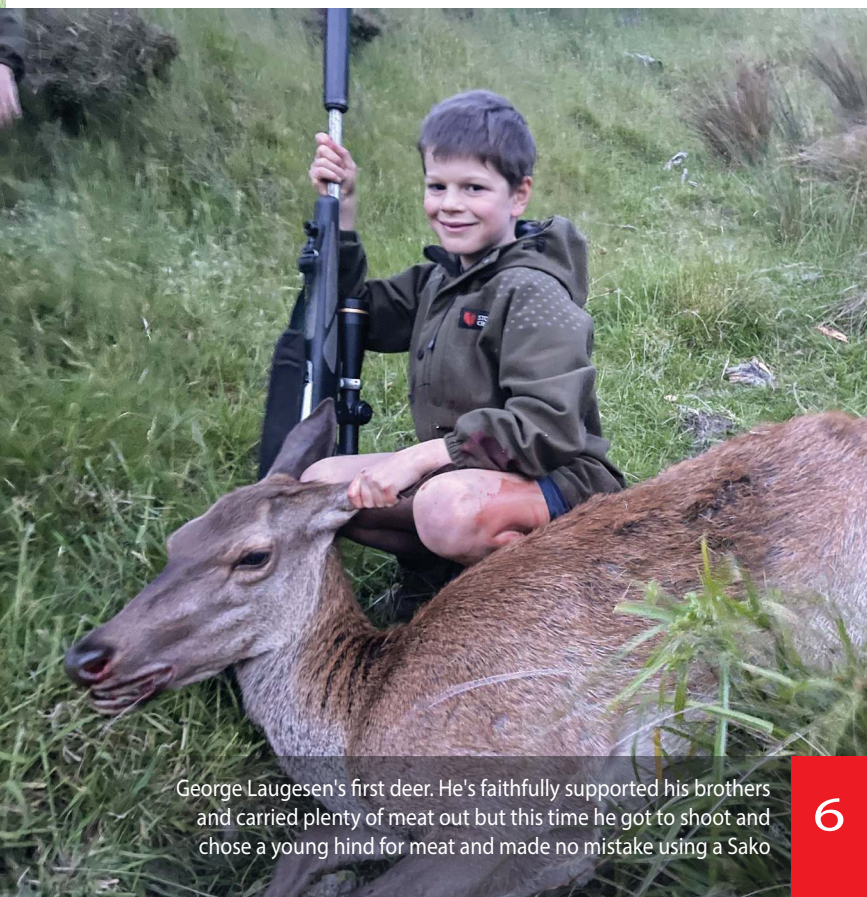
7

Charlie Byrne (15) - a hind I shot at 420 yards with a
Tikka 270 while out on one of my first overnight trips



George Laugesen's first deer. He's faithfully supported his brothers
and carried plenty of meat out but this time he got to shoot and
chose a young hind for meat and made no mistake using a Sako

6



GAME ANIMAL COUNCIL NEWS

WRITTEN BY
TIM GALE | GENERAL MANAGER



Active management has allowed the FWF to enhance the quality of the Wapiti hunting resource while decreasing numbers

A new Government and new opportunities

2024 is full of promise for the hunting sector. A new Government with new ideas and a stated willingness to work with the GAC and other parts of the sector on improving hunting and the progressive management of game animals will bring new opportunities.

The GAC has already had some very productive conversations with the Minister for Hunting and Fishing, Todd McClay, and has provided formal advice to both Minister McClay and new Conservation Minister Tama Potaka through our Briefing to Incoming Ministers, which is now available on the GAC website (www.nzgac.org.nz).

It is important to the GAC, and we believe, important to the future of hunting and game animals in New Zealand, that there is a continued

emphasis on the development and implementation of effective and balanced game animal management as set out in the Te Ara ki Mua game animal management framework.

As our briefing to the new ministers advises, this will be achieved through the use of site-based management programmes grounded in science, an improvement in the monitoring, delivery and evaluation of game animal management, and coordination and capacity building across the communities, organisations and agencies involved. Certainty of investment over the long-term is required to achieve this and deliver effective game animal management across New Zealand.

New Zealand has a poor history when it comes to game animal management. Typically, we have relied on either a passive 'do-nothing' or reactive approach. The GAC sees consistent, active management as the key to maintaining sustainable game animal herds that provide for great hunting opportunities and good conservation outcomes.

Hunters have a big part to play in active management, which is why the GAC is encouraging our new ministers to help provide the environment for more hunter-led management programmes. With a strong network of clubs and foundations in the hunting sector willing to get involved in active management, there exists an opportunity to empower the sector to do much more in this area.

Herds of Special Interest

One of the policy areas both the GAC and the new Government are keen to progress is the development of the first Herds of Special Interest (HOSI).

Provided for in the Game Animal Council Act, but yet to be designated, HOSI provide the legislative means to identify, designate and manage a specific population of game animals in a specific location to improve hunting. The result being more active and intensive

management of the herd by hunters and the hunting sector.

A HOSI can not only provide enhanced animal quality and, where necessary, decrease animal densities through more active management, but it can also provide wider conservation and recreational benefits from volunteer hunter-led initiatives.

If you are looking for an example of where this type of thing is already happening, then look no further than the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation's work in managing Wapiti in Fiordland. Every year between 800 and 1200 Red, hybrid or lower quality deer are removed from the area by the FWF on top of the contributions from recreational hunters. FWF volunteers also undertake extensive predator control and native species conservation work. The result is a high quality, lower density hunting resource that attracts hunters from all over the country and provides better outcomes for native vegetation and birdlife.

While there remains plenty of work to do behind the scenes to make it happen, the designation, creation and initial management planning for the first HOSI is in sight. Once established, it will be critical for the hunting sector to get in

behind it because it will be the shop window for hunter-led management and conservation. If we get it right, I believe we could look forward to a number of HOSI in the future and greater public and institutional trust in hunter-led management programmes more generally.

Brush up on your hunting skills in time for the Roar

At this time of year, I find it hard not to get excited about the upcoming Roar period.

Without-a-doubt, it is the best time of year to be a hunter. I generally like to take a solid 10 days to two weeks off and really immerse myself in hunting, which means I can properly relax without the pressures of work.

My preparations for the Roar always start fairly early by donning the running shoes to lose some of those easily gained Christmas and holiday cheer kilograms and making sure I've got all the gear I need. I also spend plenty of time

planning and discussing my trips with hunting mates and researching hunting locations.

For hunters who are relatively new or inexperienced, or those that want to brush up on their hunting knowledge to maximise their chances of success this Roar, I recommend you incorporate the GAC's free online hunter education and safety programme, Better Hunting, in your Roar preparations.

With 28 modules that cover everything from navigation, river crossing safety, backcountry first aid, situational awareness, and the safe use of firearms, there is heaps to learn and lots of tips to not only make you a safer hunter, but also a more successful one. Better Hunting can be used on most devices and can also be accessed offline by downloading the Moodle free mobile app. The platform saves your progress as you go. Just go to www.betterhunting.nz, create an account and get learning.

The NZ Game Animal Council is a statutory organisation working to improve the management of game animals and hunting for recreation, communities, commerce and conservation.

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THOMAS RIVER HUT

WRITTEN BY ~ ANDREW BUGGLASS | REMOTEHUTS.CO.NZ

Thomas River Hut is one of many of the remote low-use huts that are now maintained by locals or high-country community groups

It is located partway up the Thomas Valley, a tributary of the Haast River in South Westland. Geoff Spearpoint of Birdlings Flat is the contract signatory and looks after two other huts in the area, Roaring Billy and Tunnel Creek.

In 2016 Geoff used some Back Country Trust funding to carry out hut repairs and trackwork in the Thomas valley. Shortly after, in 2018-19, a series of floods washed out a large section of riverbank and left the hut hanging over the edge. Department of Conservation staff from Haast came to the party at that point, cleared some forest on higher ground, and winched the hut out of harm's way. **In September 2019 a volunteer/ DOC team moved it to the new site and in 2020 Geoff and friends reattached the chimney.** October 2023 saw more painting and trackwork carried out by Geoff and some Permolat friends. Prior to all of this Thomas River Hut hadn't had much in the way of maintenance for a couple of decades. DOC's input had been minimal from 1987 when it took over the management of high-country facilities from the New Zealand Forest Service.

The Thomas Valley is on the true right of the Haast River which must be crossed by raft or jet boat for foot access to the hut. As a result, it only gets around 20 visits a

year, a significant percentage of whom are fly-in hunting or fishing parties. The route up the true left of the valley is a mix of track and river travel and downstream from the hut the river tumbles through some rough bouldery sections cloaked in beech/hardwood forest. **Thomas River Hut is located on the forest edge at a point where the river flattens and becomes quite picturesque.** Trout and eels can be seen cruising in the deep, crystal-clear pools, but the fish here have become savvy enough to thwart the lazy types who figure they can flick a fly out and catch a meal from the hut door. Sandflies abound at the hut site during



Thomas River views



Lower Thomas River



daylight hours and in summer the mozzies come down through the chimney to do the night shift.

There is a short section of marked track up-valley from the hut to where there is a good ford, but the remaining 15 kilometers of the catchment is untracked and wild. Deer are present in reasonable numbers throughout and the forest is usually quite open in its understory. **Thomas River Hut is an ideal location just to hang out and relax and has a bit of something for most outdoor types.** For those wanting a more challenging tramp or circuit, the Roaring Billy Hut can be accessed over the Thomas Range, or the recently built hut on the Mataketake Range. Tops access up through the bush faces is reasonable with the odd deer trail to follow.

Tourism West Coast recently did a pitch citing Thomas River Hut as a wilderness destination for overseas visitors along with Mt Brown Hut further up the Coast. Both are small, basic, volunteer-maintained structures with limited capacity and the latter is already suffering from severe overuse. **It's an affront to those who put time and energy into the huts to see them promoted by an organisation that doesn't contribute to their upkeep, or manage numbers, and whose target group neither contributes, nor has any special connection.** These visitors are unlikely to have had prior experience in the NZ wilderness and will be contending with some rough country, rudimentary trails, and unbridged rivers. The work done in the Thomas and elsewhere is carried out gratis by those who actively use and are passionate about our back country huts. Our wish is that this unique part of our heritage is vouchsafed for future generations. The tourism/recreation interface needs to be better managed to ensure this..

More information on the Thomas River Hut can be found at www.remotehuts.co.nz/thomas-river-hut.html



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	HH35LN	1800m 350m	Optical 13.9°x7.8°	2.9-23.2 Optical , x 8		\$4,999.00
	HH35L	1800m 400m				\$4,999.00

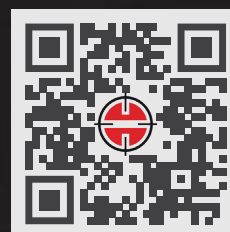


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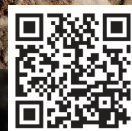
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BARLOW RIVER

WRITTEN BY
CAM MCKAY | POINTS SOUTH

TAHR BALLOT BLOCKS

Barlow River
South Branch, the
campsite is on the
flat by the river

Tucked in under the shady dark side of the Adams Range is the seldom travelled Barlow River, which rarely sees foot traffic apart from a few mountaineers and ski-tourers coming and going from The Garden of Eden Ice Plateau

Along with the original landing site situated up the main branch of the Barlow at about 1000 meters, we now have an additional landing site this year in the North Branch at about 800 meters above sea level

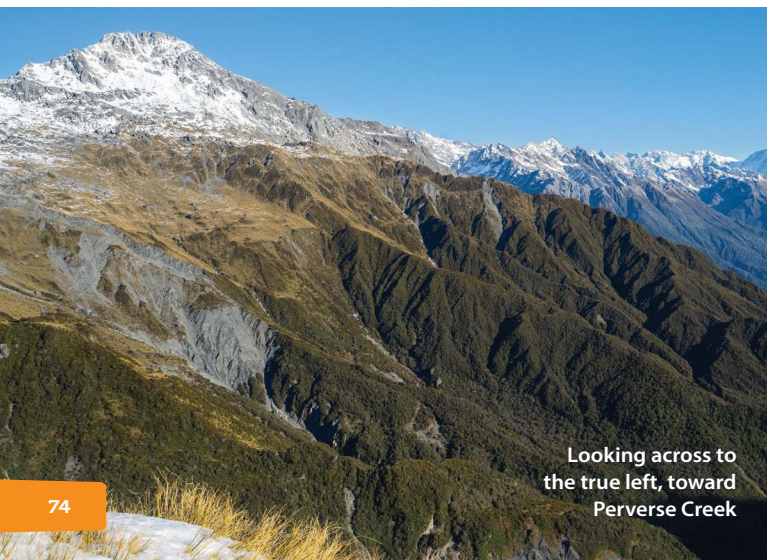
The new landing site is a great addition as it opens up some stunning but steep country, with a good mix of alpine tussock and lower scrub country. I guess the only disappointment here will be from the handful of more adventurous hunters I know that were already making the effort

to climb over and traverse the North branch, no doubt inspired by the previous lack of pressure.

With both branches of the Barlow hemmed in by 2000 meter plus peaks and several glaciers, it's safe to say you won't be seeing much sun. But the flipside is

you'll be fairly well protected from the usual West Coast storms. And with the generally steep country it's certainly going to be better suited to those who are sure footed, and comfortable with an axe and crampons in those later periods.

The original Barlow landing site has always been a fairly sought after site in the ballot. And I guess for good reason as it gives really good access to the more manageable country above camp on the true left, as well as to the steeper country on the true right. Earlier periods will be able to hunt further down the true right, but as winter sets in the ice can make travel dangerous on this dark side. The other handbrake here is that the travel downstream is known for being rather tedious (famously so actually), and it's also



Looking across to
the true left, toward
Perverse Creek



Looking down on camp
from the true right



worth noting that the party down the range a bit of the easier true left country, in Perverse Creek, will most likely also be accessing the easier country above your camp.

Fly your own firewood in as it will be rather limited to find in the scrub country around both sites, water on the other hand won't be a problem. The main branch campsite has multiple level, sheltered tent sites.

The tahr numbers are certainly lower than in years past and you will see the occasional chamois, so remember to please be very selective about the animals you harvest. Both of these landing sites are within ZIP's predator

free area, so you will probably see their sites where they are feeding tahr to the local Kea population, and with that the Kea will no doubt be very interested in the helicopter noise and your camp. So, keep things tidy and you'll hopefully be of less interest to them.

It's also really important that we all make the most of this aerial access for the tahr ballot, because if we don't use it we will lose it or have the number of sites/periods scaled back. So, if you've drawn a block you really need to commit to

hunting it, even if it's just a short weather window. Or hand it back in at the earliest opportunity so that someone else can make use of it.

As I write this there are still around six landing sites available in the last two periods. **So if you're up for a bit of a later season adventure, jump on the DOC website and grab them.**



The steep faces of the Adams Range in the North Barlow

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GWYN THURLOW - NZDA



Feral Goat ***Capra hircus***

Male = Billy

Female = Nanny

Young = Kid

Feral goats are one of the most commonly hunted animals in New Zealand, considered both the "rabbit of big game", as well as the "wapiti of small game". Their widespread distribution, high population numbers and tendency to be easier to hunt than deer make goats a common target for hunters all around the country. Beginner hunters often "cut their teeth" on goats, and they provide both good trophies and tasty meat. After all, who doesn't like goat curry?

Initial Liberations:

Captain James Cook first released goats (alongside pigs) into New Zealand in June 1773 in Queen Charlotte Sound. Numerous further liberations followed, particularly on offshore islands, to provide food for castaways and sailors. Most of these liberations were done by whalers and sealers, who would often be travelling along the coastlines anyway. As well as this, goats were farmed on the mainland for milk and cheese. When dairy, beef and mutton became popular, a lot of these goats were simply released into the surrounding bush, establishing the numerous populations seen around the country today.

Characteristics and Behaviour:

Goats are very gregarious animals – where there's one, there's usually more. Mobs typically consist of a mixture of ages and genders, with a lead billy. There are usually a couple of sentries who keep a lookout while the mob feeds – typically, these are old, wise nannies who will raise the alarm before anyone else. Unlike deer, goats are typically not very active at dawn and dusk and are more often seen out feeding in the middle of the day. Goats will feed on just about anything (including gorse) and, as a result, have been able to thrive in a range of environments, from the alpine zone to sea level.

Trophy Hunting Tips:

A pair of trophy goat horns is a welcome addition to any hunter's garage. When trophy hunting goats, it should be noted that the lead billy of a mob will not necessarily have the largest horns. Because goat horns continuously grow, billies do not "pass their prime" and begin to deteriorate in trophy quality like deer do. This means that while the lead billy will be the strongest and healthiest, the oldest goats of the group may still have bigger horns. These oldest billies will usually stay on the very outskirts of the mob, so when trophy hunting goats, it pays to have a look for them before shooting the lead billy. Another tip when hunting billies is to literally "follow your nose" – if the wind is right,

chances are you will smell a big billy before seeing it.

What is a trophy?

To be entered in the NZDA record books, a feral goat needs a Douglas Score of at least 100 DS, or a spread of at least 30". The current New Zealand record is 151 5/8 DS and a spread of 53 3/8" taken by Andrew Smit in the Hunter Hills in 2001.

Further Reading

Parkes, Brad (1990). Small Game Hunting in New Zealand. The Halcyon Press





BILLY



DRAWN BY ~ FRANCESCO FORMISANO

GAME ANIMALS OF NEW ZEALAND GOAT



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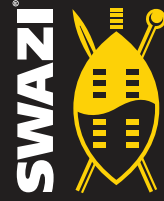




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Grand Winner

Sophie Haines (11) My Dad and I went hunting in Murchison. I shot my first Fallow buck at 150 metres with Dad's 270. We got the meat made into salamis and mince



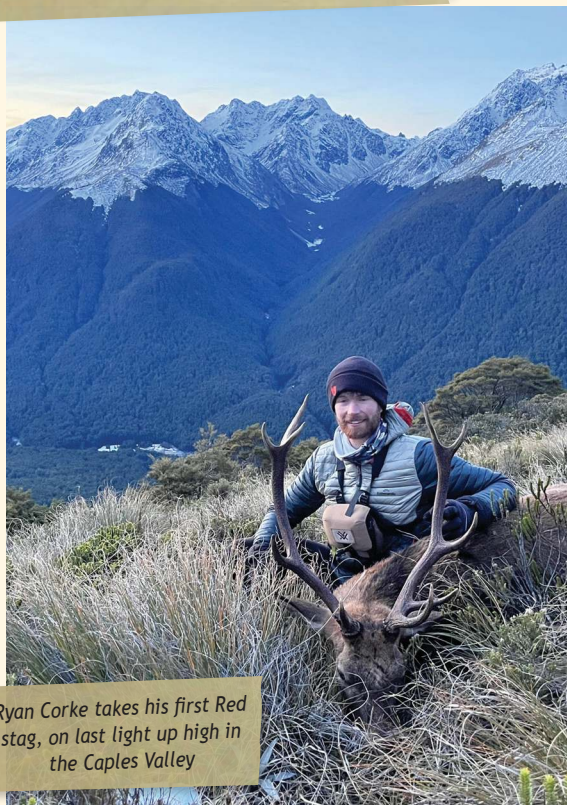
Thomas Mailing with his first stag. Shot with a Tikka 223



Jack Ferguson with his first deer, out shooting with Poppa and Grey



Sophie Haines - a chamois I spotted from where my Dad was boning out a stag



Ryan Corke takes his first Red stag, on last light up high in the Caples Valley



Tate Blair 11 with his first deer, a Fallow taken with Tikka 308 at Waitotara



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WRITTEN BY ~ GREG DULEY

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HISTORY OF CHRONOGRAPHS

Most early chronographs used a series of sky screens that relied on seeing the shadow of the bullet passing over head to trigger a very accurate stopwatch that could then calculate the velocity from the time the projectile took to travel from the start screen to the stop screen.

These were plagued with problems such as varying sun/light angles and intensity, reflections off shiny bullets etc. To get around this on our home range we manufactured light tunnels which shielded the skyscreens from any ambient light and then provided consistent artificial lighting – this worked extremely

well but was far from portable nor was it cheap! The first major leap forward in chronograph technology was Doppler radar and the Magneto speed. The latter unit was attached to the barrel near the muzzle and used electromagnetic sensors to “see” the projectile passing overhead. The issue with this was it affected the harmonics of your barrel so you couldn’t shoot for accuracy at the same time as measuring velocity. Doppler radar (think of it as similar to the K band radar used by the police for detecting speeding drivers) was used by the military for some years before the first commercially available unit for civilian use became available – the LabRadar. This was a break through

and finally provided a chronograph that would work in any light conditions while you were testing for accuracy and was very portable. Some people had real issues getting them to trigger reliably, as they relied on the sound of the shot to start the radar – which proved an issue with suppressors, air rifles and bows etc. I added the accessory microphone to ours which solved that problem and it became almost 100% reliable. While portable, it was still a reasonable sized unit and was quite heavy on battery usage. It also had the annoying habit of the “armed, ready to record” mode timing out just as you were ready to fire another shot, resulting in no velocity. It also required a little thought in how to set it up to avoid muzzle blast and to be able to record consistent velocities. Despite these short comings it has served us well as our field chronograph anytime we were away from our home range with its Oehler 43 ballistic laboratory light box setup.

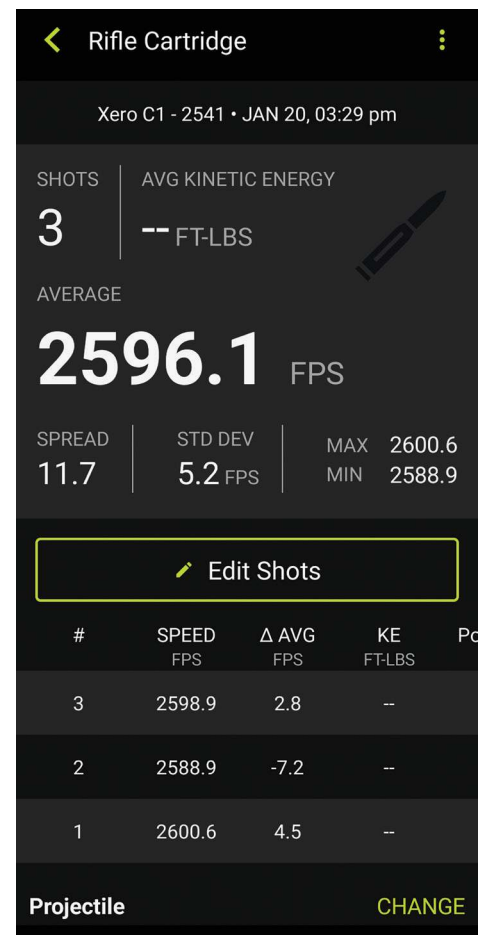
Another Doppler system called the AndiScan was released in the USA which fixed some of the short comings of the LabRadar. Unfortunately it had a whole lot of annoying short comings of its own, and its interface was far from user friendly.



Head to head testing with the LabRadar and our Oehler 43 ballistic laboratory



A session summary ready to send to the ShotView app



GARMIN XERO

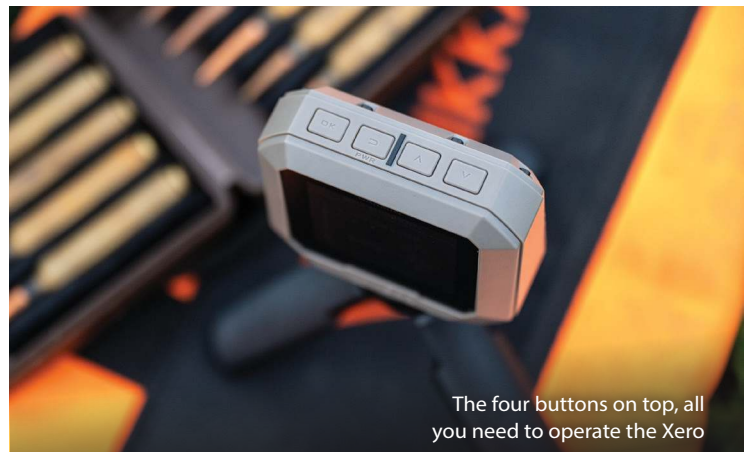
Enter the Garmin Xero C1 – the user friendly Doppler system that all the others were striving to be – but failed!

The Garmin unit is tiny – smaller than a cigarette packet! The setup is as simple as placing it anywhere from 5 to 15 inches behind the muzzle on the supplied mini tripod, and generally aligning it with your direction of shot. You control the very intuitive interface via 4 buttons on top of the unit - ok, back, up and down buttons. Once you have finished a shooting session, the Xero bluetooths to a Garmin app called ShotView on your smartphone to download the session and name and file your results. Both the unit itself and the app display all the information you could want, including summaries of every shot in the "session". From your phone you can then export the FIT file used by the Xero as an Excel compatible CSV file, and then you can text, email or air drop the results from your phone to your computer for secure record keeping. **You cannot use the supplied USB-C cord to transfer the data from the Xero to your computer, as you need to change the FIT file to something your computer can work with, hence the export via the ShotView app which does this for you.**

All Doppler units operate in the 24Ghz band, but the Xero outputs 18.68 decibel-

milliwatts (dBm) which is a significant increase over 4.84 dBm for the LabRadar and 11 dBm for the AndiScan. It also appears to have a wider beam divergence, which added to its greater power output makes it much more reliable at sensing your shots. **It seems far more forgiving of different placements both laterally and longitudinally from the rifle's muzzle.** Basically, if it gets a reading, it gives you the correct velocity. The other Doppler units are far more sensitive to placement and actually have distances from the muzzle you select on setup to try and get more consistent results. I'm guessing this again is due to the acoustic trigger they require. This brings another factor into the algorithm calculation they all must do to calculate back to the actual muzzle velocity from the reading they get at the point the projectile first enters the radar field. The Xero doesn't have this issue of variable acoustic activation so its algorithm is simpler.

The LabRadar has signal sensitivity settings and a signal response indicator



The four buttons on top, all you need to operate the Xero

to tell you when your alignment is marginal and you may struggle to get readings. Again, the Xero doesn't seem to need this as it's more forgiving due to its significantly greater power output. The Xero also has an ability to auto-detect nearby Doppler units if you are at a busy range, and changes its frequency to avoid interference.

Another benefit of its extra power is the Xero has a maximum velocity of 5000fps, verses 3900fps for the LabRadar.

The battery life is said to be a minimum of 6 hours of continuous use, but we've had much longer than that out of it. Physically the unit appears very robust and is waterproof to 1 metre, so you can use it in the rain. It also comes with a nifty little lightweight tripod.

The Garmin Xero C1 Pro Chronograph diagram shows suggested placement: 5-15" aside from the barrel, and the same back from the muzzle



HEAD TO HEAD

We've done extensive testing with the Xero C1 since we received it, including head to head testing against the Oehler 43 and the LabRadar. These are all well proven, very accurate units. The velocity changes over a string of shots matched each other pretty closely, even though different placements due to the skyscreen light box meant the Doppler units were placed further down range than the Oehler 43, requiring a calculation back to the muzzle to compare apples with apples. Using a suppressed 17HMR, which is a challenging test for any chronograph, the Xero readings varied by the same amount as the Oehler43 at +/- 3fps, whereas

the LabRadar was +/- 12fps. The Xero and LabRadar were placed next to each other on the end of the lightbox, yet the LabRadar read around 30 to 40fps slower than the Xero, and 60fps slower than the Oehler43. The Xero calculated back to be within 5fps of the Oehler43 every time, whereas the LabRadar was definitely under reading the velocities. Using larger cartridges the LabRadar managed to get closer to Oehler and Xero's velocities, but never pipped the Xero in the accuracy stakes. Also the Xero's ability to read and accuracy was largely unaffected by its placement in relation to the muzzle, and it was way more forgiving than any other chronograph I've seen.

So accuracy wise we have no hesitation

in recommending the Xero C1.

Ergonomics and user friendliness are also the best, my only complaint being you can't record/control the unit through the ShotView app live time, it can only be used once the shooting session has finished as we said earlier. You have to complete a session and then you can upload the data to the ShowView app. Hopefully this is something Garmin will address with software updates in the future. And one extra possibility that really appeals to me is actually taking the unit out in the field hunting as it's so small and simple to set up. This would be a godsend in a lot of longer range hunting situations I can think of when I get a shot that's gone slightly low or high, and I'd love to know whether it was due to a fast or slow shot, or due to me reading a vertical wind effect incorrectly. Certainly for long range target and steel shooters this would also be extremely helpful.

To end as we began, the new Garmin Xero C1 Pro is such a game changer that is truly going to make all other chronographs obsolete almost overnight – **in the words of our old mate Ziggy - this is absolutely "the one they call the one!"**

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INFIRAY FH35R V2 FINDER

WRITTEN BY ~ JOHNNY BISSELL

Last year I conducted a review of several items of thermal equipment, put out by InfiRay and marketed by Spika NZ

Spika is a relatively new brand to New Zealand and as well as producing a large amount of outdoor clothing and hunting equipment, they are supplying the InfiRay line of products. One of the products reviewed was the TL35 V2 tube scope and the viewer was the Finder FH35R. Both items worked well and were of good quality and high functionality.

As is the way with technology and the speed that improvements are made and introduced to market, InfiRay have recently released a new version of the viewer and (not surprisingly) it is called the FH35R V2. V2 as in 'version 2'. So, guess who got to have a play? I mean use the new version clinically and analytically and then report back.

So, let's get down to the question you are no doubt asking. What is different about this V2 version over the original? Well from my perspective, it would appear that InfiRay have kept all that was good, while listening to some feedback and making minor tweaks here and there.

The V2 looks just like the earlier version on the outside, but with some improvements on the inside.

The big one for me is the image clarity. Not that there were any concerns with the first model, but the V2 for me was better and the stats provided support this. Specifications state that InfiRay have

given the V2 objective a bigger aperture, while the thermal sensor remains at 640x512 resolution. For the technically minded, the 12um (pixel size) detector has a NETD of sub 20mk and the objective lens is 35mm with a bigger aperture of F0.9. This results in better brightness and contrast control, as well as just a better image. **Detail was noticeably clearer and sharper than the earlier version.**

Nice. One of the key things I look for in a thermal viewer, is simply how easy it is to look through for extended periods of time. It doesn't sound like much, but eye strain with lower quality images is a genuine thing. If it isn't good enough, my eye seems to spend all its time trying to compensate or define. Like trying to look through slightly unfocussed or blurry binoculars for a glassing session. The first thing I noticed about the FH35R V2 was that looking through it on the job for hours at a time was easy, comfortable and sustainable.

Although I had reviewed the first version only a year ago, it is easy to forget how a piece of tech operates and I felt like I was pretty much back at the start a bit. So, while I was like that, I gave the viewer what I call the Y chromosome test. **That is, how easy is it to operate without reading the instructions?** Now while the female readers may nod knowingly at this, it is actually a useful thing to know. What I was really testing for was how intuitive the settings and functions are. When it comes to using tech, I often find that if you aren't using it constantly, that it is easy to forget how certain things work and fine detail can be left out. Or in the heat of the moment at nighttime it is certainly easier if the button you need is where you would expect it to be, and the function is easy to get to, adjust and return from. The location of the buttons on top were in an L shape. This made it easier to find and press the right button at night without looking. The single line buttons in other units often mean I have pressed the wrong one at times when time was of the essence. **The Finder V2 buttons and their functions were the easiest I have used.** I had the FH35R V2 up and running comfortably within a couple of minutes and from there all I did was make the odd minor adjustment. Suffice to say that if I can operate something like this comfortably, then most people will be absolutely fine. I then watched a couple of You Tube clips on the unit to fill in a couple of blanks and I was all over every aspect of the viewer.

The start of another night out on then tools. That's the InfiRay V2 series tube scope with the ILR-1200-1 laser rangefinder in the background if you are wondering



Then I read the instructions. I will come out now and say that this is one of the easiest and least fuss experiences I have had with a thermal unit like this.

I have already covered many aspects of the original unit in the earlier review, but there are a couple of things about the V2 that are worth discussing.

» **Two Lithium-ion 18650 batteries and a double charger to enable both to be recharged at the end of one session and before another.**

The charge unit can also be connected to a vehicle (if operating out of one) to enable one battery to be charged while using the other. Or the viewer battery can be charged via USB while in the unit. I would note that in this situation that the output voltage should not exceed 5V. The batteries come with a toggle fitted on the end, to clip them in to the unit easily and provide weather proofing.

» **The viewer can also be connected directly to a power bank and run from that via USB-C.** Often when working remotely I am using solar or a power bank, so the charge options in the FH35R V2 are excellent

» **Battery life is listed as up to six hours. I found this varied a bit depending on how I was using the viewer.** I was getting about four hours when scrolling and ranging a lot, which is fine. The batteries are quick and easy to swap in and out in the field so this was no issue for me. If I owned this unit for work, I would buy two more batteries to give me

four as insurance. Once again easy to do. The batteries are a lot smaller than those in some earlier thermal units

» **You can download an app and bluetooth the viewer to your phone for a bigger screen and full adjustment capability.** Or a separate full screen.

» **A solid bottom plate with a thread to mount the unit or attach clips to it in various ways.** The plate gives good weight distribution around the thread. The underside of the unit gets warm when operating constantly, but it never got uncomfortable.

» **A good solid neck strap that comes with a QD clip and a choice of front or rear mounting points.** I would add that I would always be a bit nervous over time of the thin string giving out with wear. I have made my own neck strap for work that attaches to an inbuilt thread via a rifle sling mount.

» **A carry pouch with belt loops in it, should that be your preferred way to carry the unit.**

» **The photo and video function is very quick and easy to find and operate.** This is great as often there is a very short window to 'take a pic'

ON THE HILL

As with the earlier model, I found the viewer easy to carry and also to operate one handed. At 400g it wasn't a drag on the strap around my neck either. Quick



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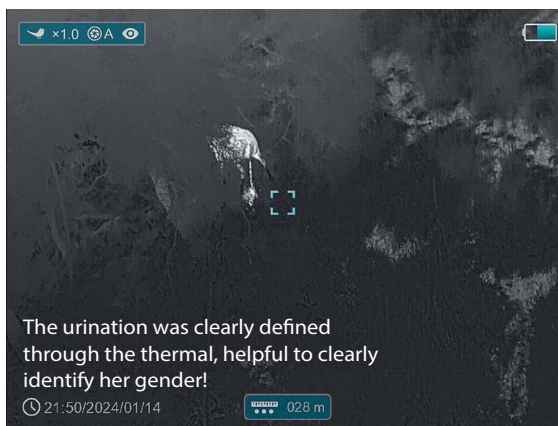
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to access and comfortable to carry like that. The magnification shown on screen is actually the multiple of the base magnification, which is 2x. So, 2 on the screen is 2x2 power=4x. The field of view on 2x was comparable with a comparative high end brand at 2.5x. **Field of view (FOV) is really important for finding and was good in the V2.** The power range goes up to 8x, which is a lot less than the 20x of another brand I have used. Do I use 20x on that unit? No. The image is too coarse at that range of digital zoom. I think the top end of 8x in the FH35R V2 is about right. I didn't find it insufficient. I used the unit almost exclusively on 2x.

First job was some native plant raiders and first cab off the rank was a hare. The ears were like beacons in the FH35R V2. This was just after dark on a hot summer's night and the big thing that I noticed was the relative lack of extra 'noise' from other warm objects that had retained latent heat. This is where cheaper or less capable thermal viewers can cause all sorts of issues. I found the V2 was really easy to use like this and with minimal 'what is that' time. **The rangefinder proved quick and simple to use, and I generally just left it running permanently.** At night when ranges can be unclear, the rangefinder removes all the question marks and helps greatly with accurate bullet placement. It is a must have on a viewer in my opinion.

Another night-long run on crop raiders confirmed my earlier thoughts. I found the V2 gave me sufficient detail and clarity to minimise the amount of time wasted scanning hot rocks. Believe me that gets

old really quickly in summer work. I could very easily find animals and define what they were. Once again, I was also finding and defining hedgehogs at several hundred metres quite comfortably, as well as finding mice up stalks in long grass, and small birds roosting in foliage. As a wildlife observation tool, a thermal unit with good definition is a fantastic tool to watch animals going about their business unaware. Rabbits and hares went down as I worked my way through broken country. **A couple of nice Fallow bucks were watched and let go as per property requests, but a dry doe was a different story.**

I watched her carefully to make sure I got it right and in that time she urinated, which was interesting to observe through the thermal. When she moved off, the puddle was still clearly defined. I worked quietly into 30m and she never knew what

hit her. She dropped into a steep scrubby face and my thoughts of venison started to get a bit less confident when after ten minutes, I still couldn't find her. And on the one time I had left Sami behind due to rabbits and hares being shot. So, I found a high point and used the V2 to look below me for blood. A small patch put me on the right spot and ten metres down the face I found a hock sticking out. The rest of the animal had gone into a hole and been covered over as she fell. Whew. I hate leaving fat venison on the hill if there is a chance to recover it, and this night was one such time where I could. **I skinned and hung the legs up to cool while I carried on working and grabbed them on the way out.** The walk home also came with a bonus large feral cat. That was on a mission heading somewhere, but not fast enough. Then it was watching a doe and big fawn mooch away quietly and a couple more hares in the bag. Even with a heavy load, I could still operate and scan comfortably with the V2, 'just in case'!

So, in short, I really like this unit. Its portability, functionality and ease of operation makes it a winner. The original FH35R reviewed was also good, but in my opinion, the V2 is better, and with enough difference to warrant an upgrade if you have the original version. The other startling thing about this unit is the price. I have not used anything this good before that comes at the price that it does. To be honest, it has got me thinking about whether I should be going down this road myself as well. **It will be hard to put this unit back on the courier.**



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MODEL	SENSOR	DISPLAY	RANGE	FOV	MAGNIFICATION
TH50 V2	640 x 512, 12 μ m NETD $\leq 25mk$	2560 x 2560 AMOLED	2600m	8.8° x 7.0°	3.5x-14.0x



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MODEL	SENSOR	DISPLAY	RANGE	FOV	MAGNIFICATION
FH35R V2	640 x 512, 12 μ m NETD $\leq 20mk$	1024 x 768 AMOLED	1800m	10.5° x 7.9°	2.0x - 8.0x



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IRONMAN SWIFT 1400 ROOFTOP TENT

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

I've been a fan of rooftop tents for a number of years now. Sam and I love a good road trip, and the convenience and comfort of them is brilliant

Initially we used a soft shell tent, the fold-out type, from Ironman. We loved this for a number of years and did well over 10,000 k's with it on the back of the Hilux.

What we really wanted though was easier takedown system. When I say we, I mean me. I'm a grumpy bugger in the mornings and we usually like to be up and away early one way or another, be it for hunting or travelling. **Clambering around the wet or muddy ute to attach the soft cover did my head in so I'd been watching the guys with hard-shell rooftop tents closely.** The major limitation of a rooftop tent (RTT) was that once it was set up the vehicle was out of action. Having a tedious packdown meant I was loath to put the tent away for the sake of anything that required the ute, like a drive for an evening hunt etc.

The price made me consider the necessity, but a jammed zip on the soft shell a couple months out from a big 4wd trip for the TV Show annoyed me just enough to seal the deal. All of the hard shell roof tents (of the hinge design like the Swift 1400 not the jazzed up soft shell

like the Nomad) are expensive products to get in to NZ, typically ranging from \$3,500 to \$6,000 plus, so Ironman 4x4 once again provide a great value product here.

The hinge design tents are marvelously quick to set up. With the Swift 1400 you simply unclip two latches and push up, gas struts do the rest. The tent is liveable there, and on some late nights that's all I did before I crawled in, but for the full experience you place two metal stays (of the same design seen in the soft shell) to brace the awning. **To pack up you simply pull the rods down, pull up the bungee loop that pulls everything back inside the casing, then close the lid.** When the tent was packed full of bedding sometimes I had to tuck a stray bit of canvas back into the casing before latching the tent, but the process is incredibly quick. I won't be going back to a soft shell that's for sure!

The Swift 1400 includes important premium features like a condensation mat under the mattress and an insulated roof, the ones that are just a simple aluminium box would be fairly uncomfortable.

It also comes with two roof racks rated to 50kg, and the gas struts on the opening mechanism are rated to 40kg. Perfect for spare soft bags, recovery tracks, hi-lift jacks or ideally solar panels if you're going for the full touring setup. It also includes all mounting plates and bolts, and 2x full length mounting bars.

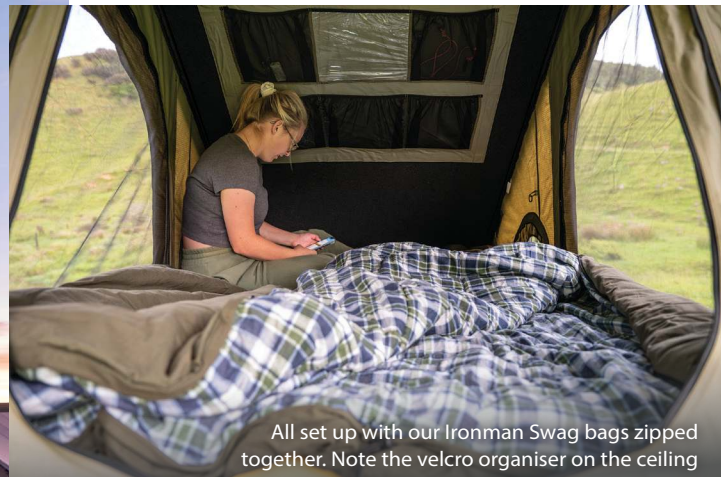
The Swift 1400 had great protection from the elements. In one 4000k

roadie it didn't get any dust or rain inside, despite being subjected to Otago dustbowl conditions in a convoy of eight vehicles for five days or so. Once erected the quality canvas and zips haven't let a drop of moisture in. Another highlight of the easy setup and take-down is that you can dry your tent out more easily. It became such a hassle for me setting up the soft-shell that I often neglected to dry it out quickly after wet nights – not good practice for canvas.

The tent provides huge ventilation for summer, unsurprising coming from Aussie! Ports for power, small vents down by your feet for controlled air flow, or huge side panels which can be opened up completely. You can also mount the



The Swift on our 4,000km Otago and Southland roadtrip. The ease of setup and packup was very much appreciated while we were busy hunting and filming in the late evening and early morning



All set up with our Ironman Swag bags zipped together. Note the velcro organiser on the ceiling



The slim shape when packed was better for fuel economy, and with the roof racks can store up to 50kg on top



The tent has great ventilation options, and the case has flawlessly kept dust and moisture out. Here you can also see the included roof racks



The hinge design provides ample room inside, and the awning keeps rain out of the opening on wet days

ladder there for side access if you prefer.

Inside is a large ceiling organizer can be moved around anywhere, and includes a clear panel to play movies on your phone or tablet! You can use Velcro to attach anything to the inside, and I've been working on a clever idea for a hanging, stowable tray. There is 1500mm of headspace at the peak, plenty of height for getting dressed. The inside is 2300 long and 1500 wide, providing ample space.

The design of the tent includes a perimeter 'T slot' for mounting the hardware, but also accessories like awnings and is handy for hiding wiring or mounting lights etc.

For those used to the soft shell models, the hard shell RTT has slightly less space

for bedding. With this one we had room for a mattress topper and the two swag bags, but not pillows. We probably could have stretched it to fit but I didn't want to bend the aluminium of the casing and damage the excellent dust seal. The ladder is also external, so you have to store that in your vehicle somewhere, but the telescopic design Ironman use is nice and compact. I tucked it behind my fridge on the back seat.

The Swift 1400 is reasonably heavy at 88kg so it can't go on most canopies, and that's without the 4kg for roof racks. However I mounted it easily by spanning it from my aluminium WYK dog box at the rear to the flatdeck head rail, this creates

a nice covered cooking area on my flat deck Ute. I'm quite keen on investing in an awning to extend that one day.

This was a serious upgrade from a soft shell RTT and it's made our camping procedure really easy. **I can't quite put in to words how much it delights me being able to pull the tent down, close two latches, and disappear into the sunrise.**

RRP - \$4,240

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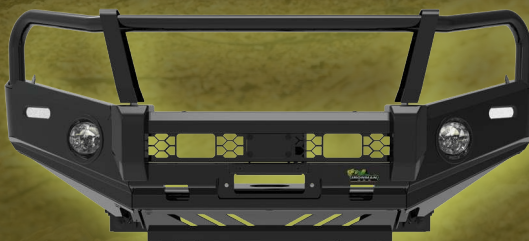


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HUNTING NORTH AMERICA

WRITTEN BY ~ JOE FLUERTY



In my mind, the mountains that we moved through were similar to the East Coast tahr mountains that I was familiar with, except that these mountains held Dall sheep, and that is exactly what we were after

Arguably, the story of Canada and I dates long before 2023. As a young'n, I had big dreams of being a part of North American hunts, specifically the northern moose hunts. In my mind, it was never a quest to try and conquer the animals, but the potential of great untold adventures

Several years later, the Canadian dream was still alive for me. However, I found myself in a typical situation of working as a tradie and dealing with life commitments that seemed to pile up with each passing day. Thinking back on those times, I remember feeling that the growing distance between my reality and my dream was becoming like a runaway train, and that I was getting left far behind.

It's amazing that in times of change, things can feel chaotic and uncertain, yet also full of potential and excitement. A safe job becomes not so safe, but in return, opportunities are created from it. Covid had hit, and I was without a job, but an incredible opportunity to work alongside Joe (J.E WILDS) had come about. **The dream was reignited and this time I saw it through the lens of my camera.**

Working with Joe enabled me to sharpen my camera skills while pursuing my passion and giving more of my own creative flare to my work. It quickly became apparent that I was suffering from a relentless obsession, fixated on learning every little thing about new lenses and cameras, trying to get my hands on those best suited for the future

I had envisioned. An obsession like this leaves a man's bank account in tatters but I'm thankful for that leap as it gave me a substantial set up for the opportunities that followed.

To make a long story short, this led me to finally experience some of the dream hunts I had always wanted to be a part of. In 2022, I travelled across America and Mexico, filming a number of different hunts, from Mexico Coues bucks and Colorado bull elk to Alaskan brown bears. **To say the least, that trip was a complete riot and there are enough stories to fill a book.**

The momentum continued in 2023. In early August, after the mammoth New Zealand hunting season wrapped up, I was on a flight headed to the Yukon.

When it comes to Canadian outfitters, one of the most prominent names in the industry has to be the Lancasters. I had often heard of the Lancasters over the years, and they are known to have some of the best hunting concessions on offer and to be a team of true, genuine Canadian folk. **Without a doubt, there were multiple 'pinch myself' moments as I embarked on the journey to work alongside the team.**

Days of travel brought us through the Yukon into the neighbouring state, the Northwest Territories. Now, I'm quite used to the thrilling and addictive feeling of being dropped by chopper into the back country of New Zealand, but as we made our way into our hunting area, I struggled to grasp how far back into the middle of nowhere we actually were.

In my mind, the mountains that we moved through were similar to the East Coast tahr mountains that I was familiar with, except that these mountains held Dall sheep, and that is exactly what we were after. The first hunt had us searching for a big, old Dall ram. Like most alpine hunts, hours were spent moving around



Marcos and his Dall ram



One of the huge caribou taken that season

and glassing across the country searching for small white dots on the opposite hillsides. A bachelor group of rams warranted a closer look, and just as Josh Lancaster (guide) suspected, there was a ram in the group of appropriate age and size for Marcos (client) to make a move on. **After a tedious stalk, we were on to plan D as the sheep moved around the valley throughout the day, constantly changing the game for us.** Timed well in mid- afternoon, Marcos dropped the hammer, securing his trophy ram and what a ram it was. Although I was not dismissive of Dall sheep, I found that they truly are a magnificent animal to come across. In sheep hunting circles, they talk about hunters getting a thing called 'Sheep Brains', where, in sheep hunting season, all they think about is sheep. It's like a total all-consuming obsession that takes over. Moving the ram's head around and taking in the first few moments up close, I

got a taste of what it's like to have 'Sheep Brains'. There's something oddly satisfying about admiring a ram's majestic horns, full curl, and numerous growth rings.

After a quick stop in base camp, we had our gear cleaned up, food stores replenished and were back out again, this time looking for a bull moose. I hadn't yet seen a moose on the trip, so it's safe to say that the anticipation levels were high. This time, Brett Lucas was the guide. He has spent the last 20-plus years guiding across Canada and has a wealth of knowledge.

Brett was the type of guy you could easily listen to for hours on end as he shares stories and thoughts, and to be fair, that's exactly what I did for the duration of the hunt.

Time is what we had plenty of on this trip, as the weather had left us camp-bound and not able to see much more than a few tent lengths into the country in front of us. After several days we were all very

ready to cover some country and start laying eyes on the big brown buggers.

Thankfully, a break in the skies allowed us to venture out.

Hunting our way up the main valley, we made a point of glassing up the many drainages that led into it, trying to leave nothing unseen. During a stint of glassing, Brett ran up a ridge beside us, looking into a smaller offshoot valley and wouldn't you know it, there were two bull moose grazing in the bottoms. No time was wasted in getting over there and into position. At 500 yards, Kevin (client) let 'er rip, sending several rounds down range at the bull. The first shot was a beauty, and the rest were just for reassurance - bullets are cheap when you plan to take home trophies of this calibre. It is worth mentioning that the Alaskan-Yukon moose are commonly known to grow out to 6 ½ - 7 foot at the shoulder height and can weigh well over 700kgs. Walking up to a creature of this size is



It is worth mentioning that the Alaskan-Yukon moose are commonly known to grow out to 6 ½ - 7 foot at the shoulder and can weigh well over 700kgs



A bull we took later in the season



Head held low, he was slowly walking in on us, his gaze was locked on and only eight yards away

beyond description; I was taken aback by its sheer proportions. We were all thrilled - there was much congratulations and laughter but we soon quietened by not only the job ahead of us, but also by the knowledge that we were in prime grizzly bear country. **It's a given that a bear is going to be in on the remnants of the carcass, and we knew we didn't want to be anywhere close when it decided to show up.** Nevertheless, over three hours later, we had the bull dressed out and were on our way back to base.

Over the rest of the season, I had the good fortune to be on plenty more hunts,

all of them with notable memories and stories, from rutting bull moose activity in the thick to chasing caribou around the tundra. One encounter that really got things heated was having some close-up action with a grizzly bear, something I had hoped for since day one and which finally happened.

For a number of years, I've had a fascination with bears, which I feel is shared by many Kiwis, perhaps because they are so radically different to anything we have here at home. Having hungry, vicious and very angry killing machines walking around the mountains doesn't

seem to hold up in my mind to the 'kea destroying the camp'yarns. In 2022 I travelled to Kodiak, Alaska, filming a coastal brown bear hunt for The Mountain Project. **Over the 12 days hunting, we saw many big bears, but it was a hunt that didn't quite come together for us.** Nevertheless, it fueled my interest in these animals even more.

Until I had a true face-to-face close-up and personal bear encounter. A couple of days into a caribou hunt, we had glassed up a potential big bull for Jeff, the client, to have a crack at. The stalk took most of the day, hiking our way up a long open



An epic encounter with a huge Caribou bull



eight yards away. Making a commotion to intimidate the bear, he veered off, slightly changing his path, half circling around us and not losing eye contact with us for more than half a second. I was able to swing my camera up, capturing a few frames of the

moment. Once the bear hit our belly-crawling scent trail, its nose went down, and it started walking away. Of course, by this time, the caribou were up and about to make a run for it, but thankfully quick actions by all of us and a silly rutting bull trying to round up his ladies, we were able to get into position and take the shot. I took a quick look over my shoulder, just in time to see the bear was tearing into our packs and having an absolute field day. **Anxious to see what sort of state our packs were in, we quickly made our way back to them, gun at the ready.**

On a distant ridge, we saw the bear moving off. Rolling over our bags and checking out the damage, we found decent bites on them, but thankfully, they were in good, workable shape. I can only really speak for myself, but I feel the

others would agree that this encounter really scrambled my mind for the rest of the afternoon. It was a situation where time felt like it was in slow motion, and I was thinking over so many different facets of how the situation could have panned out. **It left me with some sort of mental hangover for the rest of the day. Having only a camera to defend yourself while being hunted down is an unparalleled feeling.** We were pretty damn lucky on this account, but I'm thankful to come home with such a story to tell. And safe to say, I don't plan on ever parting ways with my grizzly-chewed pack any time soon.

The end of September brought my time in the Northwest Territories to a close, but I had a brief few days between work which I spent chasing bugling elk in Alberta. Capturing images of buglers was by far one of the coolest ways to finish up the Canadian trip, but it wasn't home time for me yet.

Over the month of October I filmed a handful of hunts throughout the States, and was even fortunate enough to have a couple of my own tags in my pocket, but those are a story for another day.



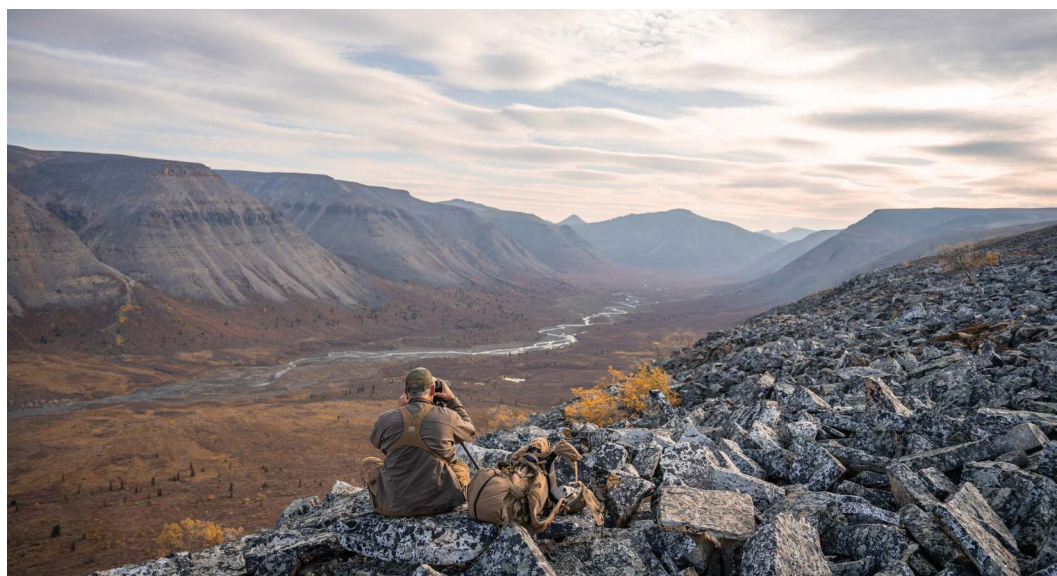
ridge. To close the last 100 metres to our planned shooting position, we dropped packs and belly crawled, keeping out of sight from other caribou that were just up from our target bull. **Three-quarters of the way across the flat opening, and things were going to plan; a feeling of reassurance already started filling our minds, and we were all very excited.** I took a slight glance over my shoulder as a dark figure caught my attention right behind us.

Before I even assessed what it could be, my instant reaction was to jump to my feet.

There was no doubt it was a grizzly bear. Head held low, he was slowly walking in on us, his gaze was locked on and only



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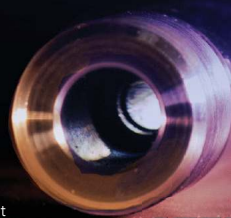
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KEEP IT SIMPLE

WRITTEN BY CALLUM MCKENZIE

WITH ANOTHER SEASON IN THE BOOKS THE REALITY OF LIFE AND ALL ITS DRAMAS, AND THE LACK OF TIME SET IN THAT LITTLE BIT MORE.

Something had to give and for myself, that's been my own personal time in the outdoors. Moving to a new area last summer meant that the ease of just popping out to a spot where I knew birds would be close by or passing through was not going to be the norm-back to square one.

Finding new spots to hunt isn't always easy and more often than not, it is going to chew up time. That being the case, I had to be a bit smarter and kill two birds with one stone. The kids needed some time out of the house, my wife definitely would appreciate a bit of a break, the fly rod seemed to be calling my name and there you have it, a handful of very good excuses to go and keep an eye out for a duck or two. The next part is where a bit of cunning



.....

saved me some time. Before the season started I fished an area that I'd seen ducks mulling about. I figured if farmers close by were feeding out, ducks would probably be in the area and likely be returning to roost around late morning/mid-day- that was my logic anyway. So during the season I went back for another nosey. A later start made it a lot easier getting the kids in the truck and the spot I had fished was open all year round-winning. If I had been there at the crack of dawn I might have seen a bird or two moving but I don't think I would have seen enough to generate some real excitement (not that it takes much for me). If I was going to return I really wanted to make the most of my time. Plus rushing in the morning with kids never ends well and I wanted to make this as much fun for them as it was for me.

As the kids and I were mucking around on the lake edge I spotted a half dozen ducks returning to the lake. The whole way back to the water they didn't detour or change their line, knowing exactly where they wanted to be. The ducks glided through the tops of the willows, hooked a U-turn over a bit of open water, cupped up and dropped straight in beside the trees. Seeing mallards behave like that sends shivers up my spine, especially when they do it like that on public water. No circling or fluffing about, they were comfy and felt very safe

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The Lucky Duck really grew on me last season after being stubborn about battery operated decoys

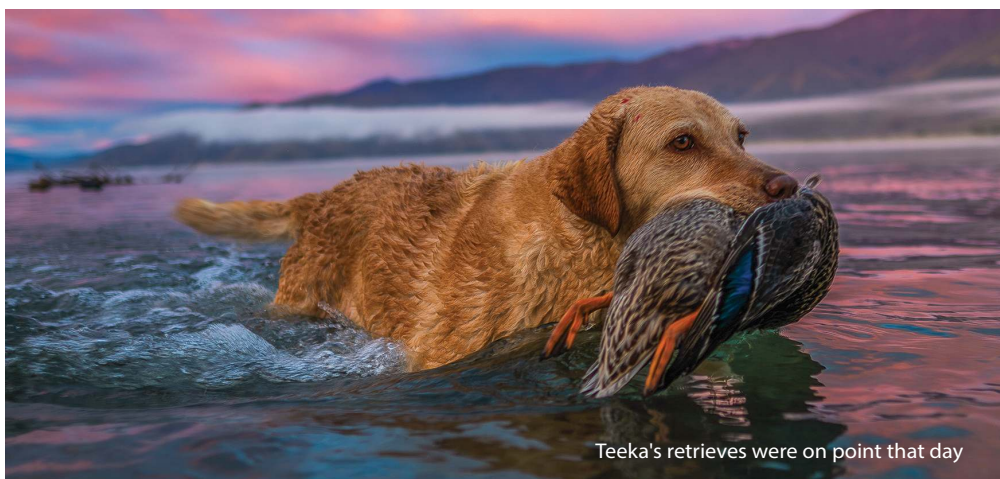
coming in there. A perfect spot for a public land roost hunt. Once they landed they didn't waste much time and headed straight for the timber, sneaking under the safety of the willows. I carried on playing about with the kids and even got a line wet while watching a few more ducks do a carbon copy of the first lot that landed. There weren't a heap of birds but plenty enough for me to warrant a hunt there the next morning.

Rising well before the birds, I snuck out the door with a coffee and started to load the truck up. Keeping it simple, I grabbed a dozen floaters, a lucky duck (something that really grew on me last season after being stubborn about battery operated decoys), blind bag with calls, ammo, food, more coffee and of course the four legged fluffy retrieving device (Teeka the dog in other terms). **I whipped around to my brother, Braedyn's place to pick him and his better half, Grace up and made our way to the water.** A not-so cold morning made travel on the roads a breeze, a welcome change to the ice that's usually trying to catch us out.

Having minimal gear was a much welcome change too compared to the usual early morning grassing of blinds and putting out decoys until your arms fall off. Believe it or not, we were all set up in time to have a coffee before shooting time, which doesn't happen all that often. We set ourselves up against a willow tree that gave us cover over top but we would have to be still as we had next to no cover in front of us. The purpose of our decoy



Braedyn with the first duck to fall to the Benelli



Teeka's retrieves were on point that day

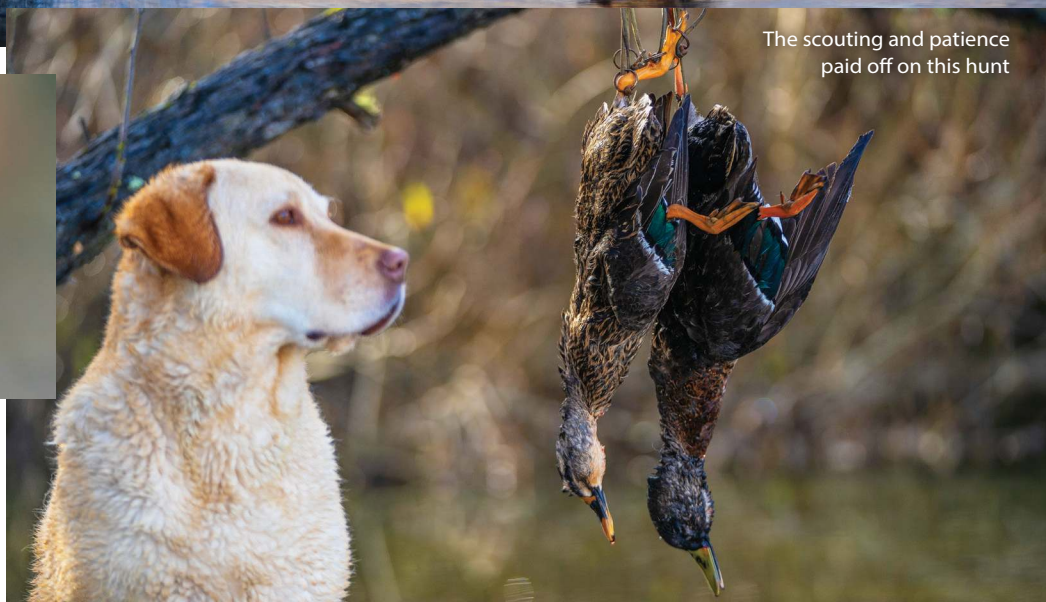
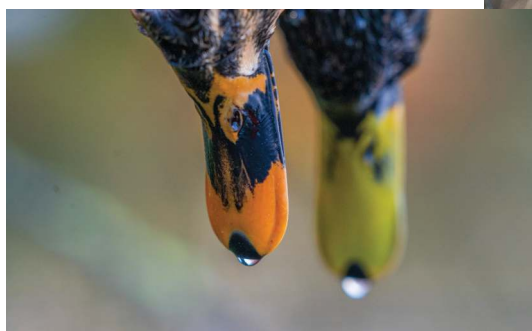
spread was to mimic what I had seen the birds do the day before but also to draw the ducks eyes away from where we were standing. **With that in mind, our calling was going to have to be selective.** If ducks were lined up straight in front or directly over top we weren't going to be able to keep talking to them, a lot easier said than done for a couple of guys who love calling. We had set a handful of decoys roughly where we wanted/ thought the ducks would want to land

then a couple more between them and the willows to imitate some ducks swimming for cover. Then the rest of the decoys were placed in amongst or under the willows. **We also placed the lucky duck with the swimmers to help draw the ducks eyes towards the decoys under the willows instead of us.** We thought this would give the birds some landing direction in case of a lack of wind.

Not long after first light we got eyes on



The scouting and patience paid off on this hunt



our first mallard. A bit of half decent calling had her interested but she wasn't keen to fully commit. She gave us a reasonably close pass and Braedyn made the call to take a shot. A single shot from his Benelli let rip and we had our first bird in the bag. It was a great shot, but we were a little concerned about the lack of commitment however it was only the first bird of the hunt. We didn't have to wait long for our second bird and this time it was a good-looking drake that committed very well. **The only trouble was he wanted to land away from us making the shot a difficult one, but we made it work.** Teeka's retrieval was on song and she had no trouble putting duck number two in the bag. Despite difficult shots we were pretty happy with the shooting, but a bit taken aback because our plan wasn't working as well as we hoped. We really wanted to be shooting our ducks right over the decoys giving ourselves the best opportunity for good clean kills. Whether it was lack of wind or sun or some other reason, it was definitely

bugging us. Discussing a couple of different decoy changes, we came to the conclusion that we'd leave it for a while and wait to see what the next duck did....if there was going to be another.

Our patience paid off and in short succession we had a mallard come across the open water and sail straight towards the decoys. Then a shelduck did the same thing from our right hand side. Both birds pulled up a touch short but were taken cleanly and again, Teeka made hassle-free retrieves. A pair caught us well and truly off guard and came in hot on our right hand side.

Braedyn pulled off a cracker of a shot on the closer bird and made the right decision to leave the second bird alone as it was getting a fair way out. As the morning carried on we managed to

get onto another bird or two. **Spotting the ducks early and keeping them on a nice line with some good calling allowed us to put the ducks over the decoys and make those shots we'd been working so hard for.** The last two ducks for the morning were hands down the best birds of the day. They responded well to our calls and decoyed perfectly. Everything about those two ducks went so well we forgot to pull the trigger and if I'm honest it wasn't hard watching them fly off to live another day. Finishing the hunt on that high note, to say we were happy was an understatement. **Hunting a new area with minimal gear and picking a handful of well-earned ducks, that's waterfowling in New Zealand at its finest if you ask me!**



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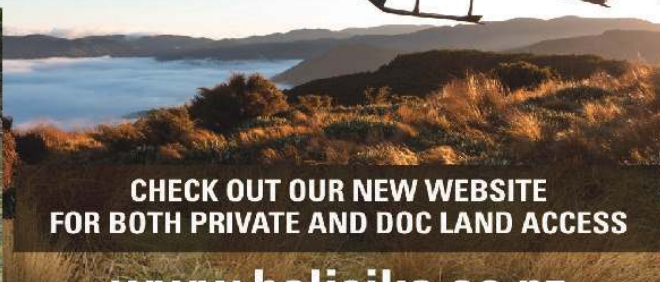
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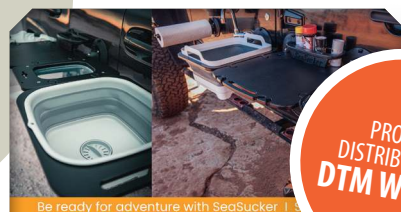
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WRITTEN BY ~ RICHARD HINGSTON

BULK CATERING

Last March, I had the pleasure of cooking for a group of international and local hunting enthusiasts for a week

One of the people I was cooking for was Luke, the editor of NZ Hunter Magazine. During one of our dinners, he suggested that I write an article on bulk cookery or cooking for a group since some people may find it daunting and have no clue where to start. With duck hunting season coming up, this could be a great time for those who have been given the short straw and landed this job. Before we even consider the menu, there are several things we need to think about.

PLACE

Firstly, where exactly will you be cooking? Will it be in a hut or a field? Do you have any shelter available, or will you need to bring your own? What kind of cooking facilities are there? Will you have access to fuel to cook on, or will you need to bring everything with you? Assuming you'll be able to pack up a truck or trailer, do you have access to power? Will there be a fridge available, or will you need to rely on chilli bins or a nearby river to keep everything cool? You'll also need to make sure you have fresh drinking water and hot water for cleaning up. Will you need to bring your own water supply, or will there be a source available at your destination?

PEOPLE

It's important to know how many people you are planning to feed and for how many days or meals. Are you planning on serving three meals a day with snacks or just breakfast and dinner? Also, it's crucial to consider if anyone has any dietary requirements. It's better to ask beforehand and make

arrangements for special dietary needs rather than wait until you're in a remote location. If someone requires specialised food or equipment, it's best to ask them to bring their own. In my experience, I had to cater for two people who were vegan and pescatarian, respectively, on a hunting trip. However, I only found out about this once we were in the field. Therefore, it's best to stick to what you know or feel comfortable doing."

PREPARATION

When it comes to cooking, your equipment should be chosen based on your menu and the amount of preparation you can do beforehand.





SAFETY

If you have been assigned the responsibility of catering, the most important aspect to consider is the safety of the food being served. It is your responsibility to ensure that the food is safe to eat and has been stored, cooked, and reheated in a hygienic manner. No one wants to fall ill while away from civilization! Therefore, it is crucial to maintain cleanliness by regularly washing hands and using sanitizer bottles. Make sure to use clean utensils and sanitize surfaces with hot soapy water before and after handling raw meat. Be mindful to separate raw meats from ready-to-eat foods to avoid cross-contamination.

It is essential to cook meat and poultry thoroughly and reheat food to above 75°C. Always use a thermometer to ensure that the correct internal food temperature has been achieved. Please note that using a thermometer is easy and inexpensive and will guarantee that your meat is not only safe to eat but also cooked to perfection every time.

MENU

For planning a dinner meal, my advice would be to do as much as possible in advance and keep it simple. Use the KISS principle, which stands for "Keep It Simple Stupid," and avoid overcomplicating things.

A well-rounded dinner should include one meat item, one starch, one vegetable, and possibly one salad and bread. Serving bread will help fill people up and give you an entrée option in case you're not quite ready for the main course. When planning for a trip, consider the duration of your stay and the food you will need. For the first night, it is recommended to bring fresh items such as kebabs, steaks, or some fresh fish. It's also a good idea to prepare meals in advance, such as curries, bolognese or casseroles. If possible, pack them in small vacuum-sealed pouches to make reheating easier. This way, you'll only need a pot of boiling water to heat them up, and then you can use the hot water for other purposes. You can also pre-make burger patties, but make sure they are placed on top of the chilly bin to avoid them turning into savoury mince in a bun. Consider the starch options that will complement your meat dish. Mashed potatoes are a good choice, made by adding boiling milk and butter to potato flakes. For curries, rice is a great option. As for pasta, fresh varieties only take three to four minutes to cook, but dried pasta is better for storage. There are many different types of noodles and pasta available. Corn fritters are also an easy option that can be prepared in advance." If you can get fresh vegetables, that's great. Otherwise, you can opt for prepared and cut cauliflower, broccoli or bok choy. Whole cabbage and carrots are also good options, depending on the season. Corn on the cob can be grilled on a BBQ or boiled after peeling. Alternatively, you can buy pre-mixed

Preparing in advance allows you to not only cook your meals but also portion them out and vacuum pack them for storage or freezing. Modern chilli bins can keep ice for up to ten days, so if you pack them properly, you won't have to worry about defrosting your food in time for dinner. Some bins can even be powered by your truck. If you're able to pre-make some items in advance, it can save you a lot of time and hassle. However, if you're going on a short trip, you may be able to take fresh food such as steaks, and cook it on the spot. Once you're all set up, it's best to take control of the meal, but don't hesitate to ask for help from your group for simple tasks. Keep it easy and stress-free, then everyone will likely be willing to chip in.

A SIMPLE MENU

DISH	CARBOHYDRATE	VEGETABLES	SIDE	EQUIPMENT
Grilled Salmon	Roast pepper cous cous or mash potato	Bok choy	Leafy green salad	BBQ, 2x pots, bowl
Chicken kebabs	Dried pasta twists in tomato sauce	Peas	Coleslaw	BBQ, 2x pots, bowl
Curry	Rice	Broccoli		2x pots (curry if vac packed can heat in boiling water with broccoli)
Bolognaise	Spaghetti			2x pots (if bolognaise is vac packed) or just stir in a pot to heat

frozen vegetables. When it comes to preparing salad, you have a few options. For pre-made salads, coleslaw is best made ahead of time, while lettuce is better used on the day you plan to eat it. Tomatoes work well for both salads and breakfasts. If you're cooking plain rice, consider making extra to use in a salad the next day. You can add garnishes like sultanas, spices, nuts, and chopped tomatoes to give it a Moroccan-style flavor. Another option is couscous, which is quick and easy to prepare. Lastly, any leftover salads from dinner can be saved and eaten for lunch the next day. For bread, it's best to take a couple of whole

loaves that are uncut. Use these loaves first and if there are leftovers, then you can cut them into slices and toast them for breakfast. You can also make garlic bread as a starter and cook it on the BBQ. The sliced bread can be stored for up to a week. For the menu I prepared, you may only need a BBQ to cook or reheat the dishes. These days, BBQs can also act as an oven, so you can keep the food warm. If necessary, you can use another gas ring to heat water or use fry pans. You'll also need a large pot with a lid, a sieve for



rice, a colander for pasta, and a couple of bowls to serve hot items or mix salads.

Finally, you'll need a fish-style bin to do the dishes at the end.



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